

# ROUND TRIP TO HELL

*The Life and Times of Joseph Greenblatt*

...His combat experience with the Polish Army

...His daring escape from a Nazi Prison Camp

...His guerilla activities as a Partisan Fighter

...His participation in the epic battle of the Warsaw Ghetto



*George Torodash with Joseph Greenblatt*





**ROUND TRIP TO HELL**  
**The Life and Times of Joseph Greenblatt**  
by  
George Torodash with Joseph Greenblatt

*“If one comes to slay you - slay him first.”*  
*... Talmud*

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*Foreword*

I did not want to write this book. It took several years of pressure, cajoling and insistence from my family and from my friends before I was convinced. To give George Torodash the information he wanted. I had to relive the past. I had to force myself to remember incidents I buried for 50 years. It was very painful. Before this, when such memories began to surface, I would forcefully shove them back. Deep down. So far down that I could forget for a while. But I couldn't do that while we worked on this book. I had to recall terrible things. I had to think about people who died, people I loved, people who fought alongside of me. It hurts to think about these things. It hurts to write about them. It hurts to talk about them.

It hurts a lot more to live with them.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joseph Greenblatt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J".

***The Cover:***

The pen and ink drawing by the gifted artist, Joseph Grober, magnificently memorializes the valiant uprising of the Jewish fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto. The Nazi soldiers, firing machine guns and automatic rifles, are portrayed as efficient, emotionless and businesslike while engaged in a brutal task.

The Jews, knowing the situation to be hopeless, nevertheless fight back. Lacking weapons, they reply to the machine guns with rocks and sticks. Their expressions contrast sharply with the impassive Germans. The victims manifest a gamut of emotions: horror, confusion, defiance, rage, courage. They realize that it's hopeless. They know they cannot prevail, but - they fight.

*Acknowledgments*

I would be remiss if I failed to recognize the magnificent cooperation of Christine Barron and her associates at the Polish Institute of New York. They extended courtesy and assistance whenever I utilized their files to research certain incidents and locations.

I am also grateful to Lee Richardson for her professional preliminary editing which contributed so very much to the completion of this book.

And, finally, my everlasting gratitude to Joseph Greenblatt for his patience and cooperation, despite the pain he suffered while recalling the incidents related herein.

George Torodash

New York City, 1997



***Author's Tribute***

Throughout history there have been many tales of valor which chronicled the heroism of the oppressed against the oppressor, of the few against the many, of inspirational courage versus overwhelming odds...tales of Viking heroes and Irish kings, of Sikh warriors and American rebels...tales of Mexican and British and Magyar and Turk, and a hundred others who challenged the armed might of those who would destroy them. The dauntless fighters described herein added yet one more chapter to the timeless saga of the undefeatable.

## *Preface*

It is widely accepted that the Jews of Europe were the passive victims of their Nazi conquerors and meekly acquiesced in their own persecution and destruction during the Second World War. This is a myth initially concocted by German officers who lacked the nerve to report the actual facts--the countless incidents of Jewish resistance--to their superiors. Vivid evidence is available proving that the Jews of Europe did in fact revolt against their oppressors. In practically every ghetto and in every concentration camp, and with the partisans in the forests, Jews fought back. This is the story of one such Jewish fighter.

Many books have been written about the epic battles described herein. Some are scholarly works which detail and analyze the psychological, sociological and military factors affecting the lives of the participants. Others have been written as an historical record in order to detail and immortalize a terrible episode in Jewish history. The story has formed the background basis for several novels and many media productions. The heroism of the participants has been cited as an example of courage and resourcefulness in the endless battle for human dignity. It has been told and retold and will be told again for, surely, it will serve as an eternal inspiration.

This book is different. This story is unique. For it is not only a dramatic account of valor and adversity, of resistance to oppression, of a struggle by the few against the many; this is the story of a man who was one of the principal participants in a titanic battle. This is the story of a fighter whose youth was spent in battle, whose soul was scared in carnage, who literally descended into hell. This is the personal story of an individual's exceptional courage and internal fortitude. This is the story of Joseph Greenblatt, his wartime service in the Polish Army, his

daring escape from a Nazi prison camp, his combat experience with the Partisans, and his fiercest fight -- the Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto.

*Dedication*

This book is dedicated to the fallen heroes of the battles in which I fought, those valiant men and women--some forever nameless--who advanced into the depths of hell and spat their defiance. Their sacrifice gave life to others.

Joseph Greenblatt

# ***PROLOGUE***



This is not another story of Holocaust victimization; of Jewish suffering in concentration camps, of Jews suffocating in gas chambers. of Jews meekly marching to their extermination. This is a story little known and rarely told; a personal story of Jewish resistance, of Jewish heroism, of Jews fighting back.

*Round Trip to Hell* was written primarily for Jews – for their perceived version of the Holocaust created a psyche of victimization and oppression. And although this book will be of principal interest to Jewish readers, all decent gentiles will appreciate this little-known and very dramatic account of European Jews as fighters, not victims. A chronicle of facts, it reads like an exciting tale of fiction which will appeal to all, gentile or Jew, who enjoy drama, excitement, and suspense.

The story details the history of Joseph Greenblatt from his childhood in the early 1900s to the present. However, to place the narrative in its proper perspective, it is essential to understand that the travails of our protagonist actually had their origin in another time in another place. It was several centuries earlier, on another continent, in another battle for Jewish survival; a battle led by a man called Simon Bar Kochba – Son of a Star...

In the year 132 A.D., the Jews in Israel, under the leadership of Bar Kochba, launched a rebellion against the Roman occupiers of their homeland. It was the third uprising against the mighty empire; ferocious battles were fought by the Jews, which nearly resulted in the defeat of the fabled Roman legions. Uneasy over the Jewish resistance, the emperor called upon Rome's ablest general, Julius Severius, to conduct the war against the Jews. Siege tactics by the Roman army prevailed despite the heavy losses inflicted by the troops of Bar Kochba. Appalled and enraged by the Hebrew resistance, which caused not only numerous Roman casualties but also

resulted in an extreme loss of prestige which would encourage other captive states to revolt, the emperor expelled most of the Jews. The year was 135 A.D. This was the genesis of the endless Diaspora. And thus began the long migration of Joseph Greenblatt's forbears, an extended journey which took them over many centuries and over many lands.

The eternal wanderers eventually migrated to the European continent, where they settled in several western countries only to be persecuted, expelled, or forced to flee for their lives. Masses of Jews fled from Germany, Austria, or Bohemia before the swords of the Crusaders. The Jews reached Poland in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, where they were welcomed by Casimir the Great (1333-1370), who encouraged them to establish financial institutions, cultivate the lumber industry, and arrange the exportation of coal and iron. Although permitted to engage in commercial enterprises, the Jews were strictly forbidden to participate in government employment. The Jews were reasonably well off; some were even prosperous.

However, anti-Semitism, while sometimes dormant, never quite dies. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, conditions worsened for the Jews of Poland. Charges of ritual murder were periodically leveled against them; they were heavily taxed and generally loathed by the indigenous Poles. The Jews were blamed for alcoholism, for spreading the plague and even for causing the rain. They were forced to live in walled ghettos and were isolated from the dominant society. Frenzied Polish mobs, encouraged by the authorities, would frequently invade these ghettos where the hooligans murdered Jews, stole their belongings, and burned their houses. All of this criminality was enacted with impunity and sanctioned by the government.

Despite all of their travails, the Jews of Poland remained loyal citizens and joined the larger society in its defense against attackers. Jews fought in all of the country's wars despite the harsh and oppressive treatment meted out to them. These conditions continued for 700 years.

It was in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Joseph's father, Israel Shmuel Greenblatt, was the first known member of the family to engage in a tradition of military daring. The elder Greenblatt enlisted as a soldier in the legion of Jozef Pilsudski, the founder of the Pierwsza Kadrowa (Union for Active Resistance), the guerilla force formed in Cracow which resisted the Russian occupation in 1914.

In 1920, the Pierwsza Kadrowa emerged as the official army of Poland and fought the invading Russian troops who were led by Leon Trotsky. Israel Greenblatt attained the rank of Captain – extremely unusual for a Jew – as a result of his exemplary courage and inspirational leadership while an infantry fighter.

The decisive battle was fought at the Vistula River in August, 1920. Eight Soviet armies launched an attack and were engaged by the Polish legions, who drove them from the homeland. This victory became known as the "Miracle of the Vistula," and was thenceforth celebrated as a military holiday throughout Poland.

As a result of his military triumphs, Jozef Pilsudski became the Supreme Commander of Poland. Impressed by the bravery and the loyalty of the Jews under his command, he mandated that they receive equitable treatment, even trying to curtail the pogroms. Unfortunately, Pilsudski died in 1935. The Jews, despite their allegiance to Poland and their participation in its defense remained perennial outcasts, forever consigned to suffer discrimination and persecution.



This was the world into which Joseph Greenblatt was born; grandson of Chaim and Leah and Moses and Gittel, son of Israel and Yochevet. This was a world which was not inclined to accept him, a world in which he was considered superfluous, a world which challenged his basic human right – his right to exist.

# ***JUST A LITTLE INCIDENT***

Friday night. The Jewish Sabbath. I traveled from my home in Manhattan to the foreign territory of Long Beach, New York, in order to attend the services at the beautiful Temple Emanuel of Long Beach.

There was a special reason for driving so far to worship. Temple Emanuel had invited an unusual guest to address the congregation that night. The speaker's presence was of particular significance inasmuch as the community was still discussing the merits of a recent Holocaust television production, and the Prime Minister of Israel was traveling throughout the country addressing enthusiastic crowds and skeptical government officials regarding his country's security problems, i.e., the problems of Jewish survival. The guest speaker was Joseph Greenblatt.

The service commenced and progressed. The Rabbi led the Congregation in communal prayer. Midway through the holy passages, the assembled Jews were startled by the crash and breaking of the beautiful imported Italian stained glass window, as a brick tumbled to the floor and narrowly missed several people. Scores of men reacted instantly and bolted for the exits. After a short chase, a scrawny, frightened, fifteen year old boy was apprehended. The cooler heads among the pursuers prevailed and prevented a few husky worshippers from physically destroying the viciously misguided youth who was turned over to the local police. Upon the return of the congregants, the spiritual leader resumed the service, terming the disruption "just a little incident," and brought the attention back to the speaker of the evening.

Mr. Greenblatt is an unusual man. Physically unimposing, there is nothing exceptional which initially strikes you upon encountering him. A more careful examination, however, reveals the inner strength and dignified confidence inherent in one who has met the most severe

challenges life can offer--and triumphed--but at an unimaginable cost. He is a rather short man, whose speech is unmistakably colored by the harsh accents and harsher memories of his native Poland. There are no outstanding characteristics which betray the poignant youth, a life pregnant with hatred, violence, oppression, and pain.

Joseph Greenblatt can tell many tales of many battles: the street fights with Polish Gentiles who habitually attacked him and his family throughout his childhood; the war between Poland and Germany in which he served as a combat officer; his daring escape from a Nazi POW camp; and his activities as a fighter with the Polish underground in its uprising against the Nazis.

All of that, however, was put aside for the Sabbath night of May 5th. On that night Joseph Greenblatt had appeared to tell of his most memorable encounter, of his fiercest fight, the epic Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto.

The crowd of congregants sat enthralled listening while this modest, unassuming man related a tale of unbelievable horror and incredible bravery: the tale of a man who literally stared into the face of death and spat his defiance; a tale of a handful of starving, poorly equipped, desperate Jewish men and women who, after 1,808 years, unfurled the banner of Hebrew revolt and challenged the armed might of one of the most powerful war machines of all time.

The Nazi army, Poland couldn't stop it. France was crushed. Belgian, Dutch, Norwegian, and Greek forces crumpled under its firepower. It was ludicrous to consider a revolt by untrained, starving, harassed Jews who possessed only the most rudimentary armaments. After the initial encounter, the Jewish leaders thought they could maintain the struggle to save the Warsaw Ghetto for one more day. The German generals estimated one week. They were both wrong. The Jews fought for six weeks. Joseph Greenblatt related the tale of terror: how, when

the Nazis marched into the ghetto on April 19, 1943, to complete the extermination, they were driven back by Jews who turned the German armaments to ashes; how young Jews charged tanks and armored cars and blew them up with homemade bombs. He told of the heroine, Zipporah Sapeik, who kept a German platoon bottled up for four hours as she stood on a rooftop flinging hand grenades and molotov cocktails down on the soldiers and turned the street into a wall of fire.

The former fighter spoke from the depths of his soul as he relived the horror of his youth. The battle and the blood of the distant past boiled to the surface as his words flowed over the awestruck audience which was still disturbed by the "little incident" of the broken window, a highly visible and unsettling reminder. Mr. Greenblatt's voice rose as he concluded his presentation ridiculing the misconception of the surrender of the survivors. He explained that they were bound by oath never to be taken alive (for they surely knew what fate awaited them if captured by the Nazis.) His voice reached the peak of a crescendo as he roared that there were no white flags over the ghetto, that the ghetto fighters never surrendered, that the Nazis paid dearly in life and equipment, and that Jewish honor and courage were redeemed.

After a pause, his voice lowered. Gesturing toward the shattered stained glass he softly stated, "That's how it started thirty five years ago...with just a little incident."

*The rabbi distributed yellow Stars of David, sent by the National Conference of Christian and Jews, to be worn as a sign of solidarity and remembrance. Most of the people in the Temple enthusiastically wore them. When one of the yellow stars was handed to Joseph Greenblatt, he somberly refused. "I wore it enough," he said.*

That was 1968. I decided to visit Joseph Greenblatt after the religious services were concluded. I introduced myself and explained that I was researching Jewish resistance in Europe

and the Middle East. He was courteous and gracious and appeared interested. He gave me his telephone number and promised that we would soon talk.

Two weeks later I called. He remembered me and invited me to his office where he coordinated the activities of the United Zionists-Revisionists of America and operated the Tzell Travel Agency. The office was decorated with a map of Israel, an inscribed photo of the future Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin, and a bust of Vladimir Jabotinsky, the apostle of Jewish militancy.

Joseph Greenblatt and I talked for hours. I went to see him many more times. We became friends. Good friends. I met his wife and daughter. I was a guest in his home. Time passed. Slowly, I was able to extract the details of his heroic life. After years of trying, I finally convinced him to permit me to record his military activities.

Some of his deeds have been recorded in books and in military records. His exploits read like a script created for a Hollywood movie hero but with one dramatic difference: the story is true.

# ***WARSAW, POLAND***

“Kill the Jews! Kill the Jews! There he goes! Get the bastard!” Rocks flew over the head of the teenager as he ducked and ran in zigzag fashion along Koszykowska Street.

The young student had stayed late at the Rontaler School on Polna Street; he usually made it a point to leave on time with several other Jewish students who banded together for protection against aggressive Polish hooligans. When the Jews, traveling as a group, were attacked they usually gave a good account of themselves in a street fight. However, attacked while alone, they often received serious injury inflicted by overwhelming odds.

The teenage Jew cursed himself for his stupidity for staying at school in order to complete an assignment. He sped furiously down Koszykowska Street, scarcely a quarter of a block ahead of his frenzied pursuers. He turned into Marszalkowska Street and began to feel secure as he reached the intersection of Wspolna Street. Turning the corner, he ran into the building at 7 Wspolna and slammed the door. Safe. He was home. The angry Polish assailants threw a few rocks which bounced off the apartment house, swore that they would get the goddamned Jew next time, and walked off tired from the unsuccessful chase and frustrated by their fruitless efforts. The beleaguered student walked upstairs to his family's apartment and entered. Still breathing heavily, shaking but secure, Joseph Greenblatt was home.

Anti-Semitism, attacks by Polish hoodlums, official discrimination, government sponsored pogroms...anti-Jewish riots instigated by the government---all these were commonplace in Poland throughout the centuries. Many Jews accepted this. They had no other option. Some managed to emigrate to the West. The majority was unable to leave. The Jews were frustrated, leaderless, helpless, unsure...forced into a hopeless situation in which they lacked control of their destiny. It was into this environment that Joseph Greenblatt was born and raised.



However, a dramatic transformation was soon to occur. It was initiated by a man who was to have a major impact on Joseph Greenblatt's life and on the lives of countless other Jews. His name was Vladimir Jabotinsky.

Soon after his harrowing experience with the murderously anti-Semitic Polish youngsters, Joseph and his older brother Zygmunt were invited to attend a Zionist meeting. It was sponsored by a youth group called Betar which featured its leader, the Russian Jew, Jabotinsky.

The Greenblatt bothers were initially reluctant to attend. There were many Zionist groups and many Zionist speakers. They represented practically every shade of the political spectrum. Each organization unequivocally declared that its platform contained all of the solutions to the problems besetting the Jews, the historical pariahs. Joe and Zygmunt had heard it all. Many times. However, the boring meetings did have one positive prospect: after the speeches and the counter speeches, the arguments and the counter arguments, time permitting, the boys and the girls would socialize. Sometimes the social connections were worth the verbal nonsense tolerated by the listeners. So Joseph and Zygmunt Greenblatt decided to attend the Betar meeting and hoped they would not be bored. They weren't. The meeting room was filled to capacity. The Betar organization was building a large membership.

Jabotinsky rose to speak. The audience was immediately impressed by his military bearing and charismatic presence. They instantly sensed that this was no ordinary man but an obvious leader, brilliant and compelling. There was no boredom or restlessness within the assembly that night. The Polish youth were held spellbound by the man considered by many to be the greatest orator of his generation. Jabotinsky's program was simple and direct: the Jews had no future in Europe. They must channel their energy and their efforts in one direction only--a

large scale emmigration to Palestine and restoring the Jewish nation as a national homeland. He preached military training, physical conditioning and self-defense.

A journalist by profession, Jabotinsky organized self-defense groups in his native Russia. He joined the British army during World War I, created the Jewish Legion and took an active part in the fighting against the Turks. In Eretz Israel (literally, the Land of Israel), he organized the Haganah which defended Jewish settlers from Arab marauders. Eventually, he assumed the leadership of the legendary Irgun Tzvai Leumi (National Military Organization), the underground army which drove the British from the Jewish homeland. At that time of Hebrew liberation, the Irgun was commanded by Jabotinsky's most famous protégé, Menachem Begin.

In forming Betar out of a handful of Riga High School students in 1923, Jabotinsky imbued the everyday lives of hundreds of thousands of Jewish students from the ghettos of eastern Europe with a spirit of Jewish nobility that their people had not known since their dispersion eighteen hundred years earlier. Jabotinsky gave the forlorn Jewish youth a sense of being part of a glorious future, and he also impressed upon them a sense of the majesty of the past, including King David, the Maccabees, the Prophets and Bar Kochba, from whom they were descended.

Jabotinsky deliberately chose the name of Betar for his youth movement. It has a double meaning. It is both the abbreviation of Brit Trumpeldor and the name of the last stronghold of Jewish resistance against the Romans during the revolt by General Simon Bar Kochba. Betar, therefore, linked the site of ancient Hebrew courage and martyrdom with a contemporary martyred hero, a link that had remained unbroken for eighteen hundred years. Captain Joseph Trumpeldor, the deputy commander of the Zion Mule Corps, had been Jabotinsky's wartime

colleague, the man with whom he conceived the Jewish Legion. Trumpeldor was killed in 1920, along with six comrades, defending their pioneering settlement in the land of Israel.

Joseph Greenblatt and his brother were enthralled by the words of Jabotinsky, the fighter and the visionary. Their lives were now filled with purpose and they were dedicated to the cause of Jewish self-defense and emancipation. To understand what motivated Joseph Greenblatt it is necessary to understand Jabotinsky. To understand Jabotinsky is to understand what motivated Joseph Greenblatt.

***JABOTINSKY***

Born in Odessa, Russia, in 1880, Vladimir Jabotinsky received a secular education. At an early age he displayed outstanding literary talent and was hired by a leading Russian newspaper which assigned him to Switzerland as a correspondent. He was subsequently transferred to Rome where he also studied law. His linguistic genius manifested itself when he was very young, and he easily acquired a knowledge of English, German, French, Italian, Hebrew, and Yiddish. At the same time he studied Latin and Greek. He already spoke Russian and Polish. Later on he mastered additional languages.

When he returned to Russia in 1901, young Jabotinsky continued his literary career. He was well paid for his journalistic service and enjoyed the respect and attention lavished upon him. While understanding the Jewish problem and sympathetic to the Zionist cause, he was not sufficiently interested or involved enough to permit these feelings to interfere with his involvement in literature, art, ethics, and politics. There was no indication of the passionate devotion that was to evolve into the cause which would later dominate his life.

The direct channel through which Jabotinsky became a Zionist was the manifestation of self-defense. In 1903, the terrifying and humiliating menace of a pogrom appeared on the horizon. Finding no support from "progressive" Russian elements, and discovering the Jewish leaders were cowering and helpless, Jabotinsky organized a group of Jews into a self-defense unit. Soon, Jewish self-defense units emerged throughout Russia wherever a Jewish community existed. Jabotinsky was pleased but realistic. He knew that no matter how inspired the Jewish resistance, the numerical superiority of their enemies in a hostile country would eventually overrun the Jews. The answer: Zionism. The solution: a Jewish homeland. Before 1903, Jabotinsky hardly thought about Zionism. From that time on, he thought of nothing else.

The Turks had controlled the land of Palestine since the 18th Century. When Turkey entered World War I on the side of the German forces, Jabotinsky realized that the Jews' hope of obtaining a homeland in the area depended on an alliance with the victors. After prolonged and bitter political efforts he organized the Jewish Legion, an integral section of the British army. Commissioned as a lieutenant, Jabotinsky led his Jewish troops into active combat. The Legion was instrumental in capturing Palestine, driving the Turkish army from the region. This effective military activity of the Jewish volunteers initiated the decisive political movement that in turn would lead to the entrance of Jews into Palestine, and the eventual establishment of a state.

Upon demobilization from the British army, Jabotinsky continued his efforts to establish a Jewish homeland, while supporting himself through his literary talents. He founded the Hagana (Defense), the first Jewish defense force, which became the nucleus of the future Israeli army. When the Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization) emerged after a split in the Hagana, Jabotinsky was named as its spiritual leader, and the organization adopted his policy of armed resistance. Because of widespread dissatisfaction with the defeatist policies adopted by the majority of the Zionist Executive, Jabotinsky and his followers left the organization and created the World Union of Zionist-Revisionists. Their program emphasized mass immigration into Palestine and resistance to Arab aggression.

A visionary, Jabotinsky traveled throughout Europe in the mid-1930s calling for the mass evacuation of Jews, especially from Poland. In 1938 he predicted that a Holocaust would befall the Jews of Europe. For this he was condemned and vilified by the mainstream Zionist leadership. Tragically, the events to come would prove him correct.

Until his untimely death at the age of 60, Jabotinsky continued to meet with Jewish youths and impart his messages of nationalism and self-defense. His conferences were electrifying. He radiated charisma and engendered excitement. It was at one of these youth meetings that he met Joseph Greenblatt. And from that meeting on, Joseph Greenblatt was committed to the defense of his people and the establishment of Israel.



Vladimir Jabotinsky

***JOSEPH GREENBLATT***

***SPEAKS***

***I***



“I was impressed by Jabotinsky. More than impressed. Inspired. I was completely dedicated to the man and his ideas. He made me feel like a prince. He had this effect on all of the other young Jews who joined the Betar. He was far ahead of his time--a prophet. He traveled all over Europe as early as 1934 and warned the Jews to leave--to emigrate to Palestine; that a Holocaust was about to descend on them. He actually said that! He was the first to use the word ‘Holocaust.’

“Other Zionist leaders were preaching about all kinds of solutions to anti-Semitism: study, relocate, assimilate--all kinds of nonsense. Jabotinsky told us to learn how to shoot.

“My life was dedicated to the cause--emigration to the Holy Land. Farm it. Build it. Defend it. But we knew that the British and Arabs wouldn’t accept us peacefully, so we began to stockpile arms. We trained. We stole guns from Polish soldiers, bought ammunition from criminals, manufactured explosives--all to be smuggled into Palestine to be used in the battle for Jewish hegemony. We had no idea, at that time, that the weapons would someday be used right where we were living...in Warsaw.”

# ***SCHOOL DAYS***

Young Greenblatt, born in Warsaw, received his education in that city from kindergarten through the University of Warsaw where he obtained his law degree at the age of 23. College wasn't exactly fun and carefree; Jews were tolerated but they weren't really welcome. Anti-Semitism emanated from professors and students. Fistfights with supposedly educated Polish scholars were common.

An unwritten rule stated that the Jews had to sit on the left side of the classrooms. Joseph Greenblatt and fellow Betar members resented this system of forced segregation. They refused to be seated where directed and insisted on standing throughout their classes. Finally, the rule was relaxed and the Jewish students were permitted to sit wherever they chose. But this victory did nothing to stem the verbal and physical abuse from the Christian students. As a member of the militant Zionist organization Betar, and as a result of gaining a reputation as a willing battler, Greenblatt was frequently called upon to engage in street fights on behalf of other Jewish students. He also had to fight when directly abused or attacked.

At the University of Warsaw Greenblatt renewed his friendship with another member of Betar, a man destined to create an enormous impact on Jews throughout the world, Menachem Begin.

Greenblatt graduated from the University of Warsaw in 1937 with a law degree. He then worked as a law clerk in the Warsaw Court of Peace, the Polish equivalent of criminal court, for one year and interned in the same court, subsequently qualifying as an attorney. However, the storm clouds of war hovered over Poland. Greenblatt enlisted in the Polish Army as a cadet and was enrolled in the military academy for reserve officers.

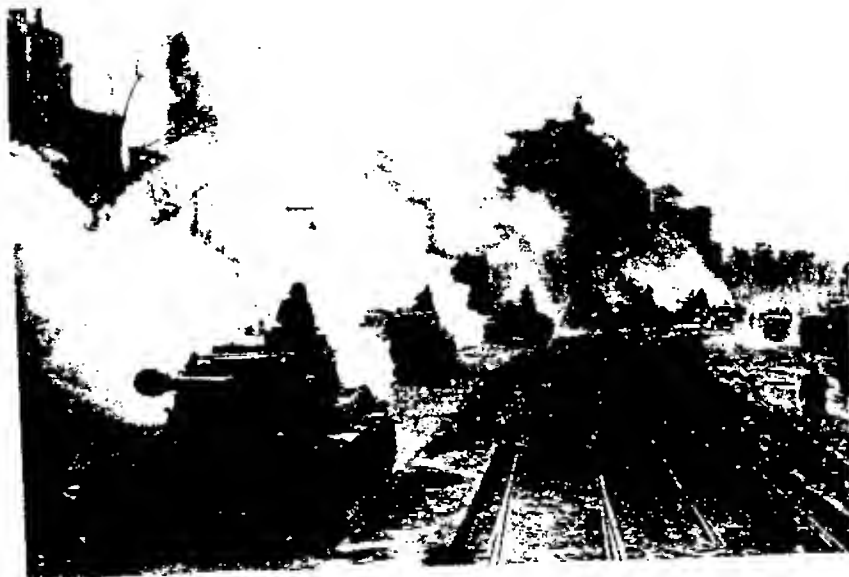
There were only four Jews in the military school. It was well known that the Polish army did not want Jews to become officers but the law specified that any male who graduated from high school and qualified for the academy had to be accepted. The military staff disqualified most of the Jewish applicants for the flimsiest of reasons. The Jews were outraged but they were powerless to affect the situation. There was no appeal. Occasionally, to avoid the appearance of outright discriminatory practice, a few Jews were accepted for officer training. Greenblatt was one of these. The battle for survival began.

Although the law stated that if Jews qualified they had to be admitted, there was nothing which guaranteed they would remain in the school. Greenblatt and the other three Jews endured anti-Semitic slogans scrawled on walls, curses, jeers and even physical attacks. One by one, three of the original four Jewish cadets were forced out. Only Joseph Greenblatt remained, determined to endure the worst that could be thrown at him. After one year he graduated with the rank of corporal cadet, a ranking which required a six-week training commitment in the reserves each year. Greenblatt progressed in rank to the position of second lieutenant. In 1938 the Polish-Czechoslovakian conflict commenced. Joseph was mobilized and automatically promoted to the rank of first lieutenant. Despite the harassment and the discrimination, despite the abuse and the assaults, despite the organized attempts to disrupt his career, Joseph Greenblatt had triumphed. But the long trip to hell had already begun.



Joseph Greenblatt as 1st Lieutenant in the Polish Army

# ***THE INVASION***



When the Polish-Czechoslovakian conflict began, Joseph Greenblatt was placed in charge of a company of 120 soldiers attached to the 14th Regiment of the Fourth Infantry Division. The troops trained approximately 50 kilometers from the German border. At the end of August, 1939, they moved to the border in anticipation of an imminent Nazi invasion.

The Polish soldiers anxiously awaited the initiation of hostilities. After months of Hitler's maniacal threats no one doubted that the German army was about to move eastward--into Poland.

On September 1, 1939, Germany launched its invasion. Attacks by the Luftwaffe (German Air Force), without warning, destroyed most of the Polish Air Force while it was still on the ground. Bombers struck at road and rail communications, assembly points, munitions dumps, and at civilian centers, creating panic and confusion. Dive bombers zeroed in on the ground forces and machine-gunned civilian refugees. Chaos erupted on the roads, and the forward movement of the defenders was impeded. The Fourth Infantry Division, with Joseph Greenblatt and his company, was ordered to attack the German forces. They were able to advance approximately three kilometers into Germany when they encountered the Nazi tank corps. A furious battle ensued. The Poles fought tenaciously. Joseph directed his company, amidst the confusion attendant to the battle, engaging hundreds of tanks and thousands of infantry soldiers. The Poles were courageous and inflicted numerous casualties, even while many of their own fell. However, the German Air Force controlled the sky and was able to bomb the Polish positions. Joseph directed his command to fire their rifles at the attacking planes. Although some planes were hit, the bombing and strafing continued, causing severe casualties to the Polish forces who

were slowly being forced back. Greenblatt was constantly firing at planes and infantry, while rallying his men and directing their fire. The battle lasted over four hours.

Division headquarters, apprised of the situation and realizing that the German counterattack could not be contained, ordered the Poles to retreat. They did so, but they continued to put up a fight as they eased back into Poland.

The next ten days were literally hell. The retreating soldiers continued to be harassed by the bombers. The Polish Air Force was non-existent and field artillery was not adequate to stem the constant attack by the Luftwaffe, the German Air Force. When night came during the retreat, the troops could rest: the Germans didn't fly in darkness. The withdrawal continued for ten days.

The retreat was devastating. Casualties were numerous.. The Poles were able to make it an even fight during the night when tanks and infantry were matched against tanks and infantry. However, when daylight came, the German bombers resumed the attack. The Nazis were able to destroy supply lines. Food was extremely scarce and reinforcements and supplies were unable to reach the lines of the retreating Polish army.

In addition to fighting the advancing German forces, Joseph Greenblatt's outfit was continuously harassed by a fifth column--ethnic Germans called *volkdeutch*--who were residing in Poland and who were armed. They continuously fired at the Polish soldiers and set the fields ablaze. In addition, they radioed the position of troop movements to the German command.

Although the Nazi forces were never more than a half to one kilometer from the retreating Polish division, the Poles were able to occasionally smuggle some bread in during the night. Sometimes the troops obtained food from supporters near their routes of retreat. Hunger became



a constant problem . At one point Joseph and a few of his men spotted a goose and caught it. They covered it with lime and baked the bird. The goose was eaten during the retreat. That was the only time Greenblatt remembers eating. The goose was literally a feast for the hungry and weary soldiers.

After eleven days of intensive combat, the Germans surrounded the Fourth Division, including Joseph's company, in the Kutna area near the river Bzura. The Poles mounted a determined resistance but, after seven days, the fighting ended and Joseph Greenblatt and his company were taken prisoners on the night of September 18th.

The Germans directed the prisoners into a huge, abandoned soccer field and proceeded to disarm and register the Poles. No moon shown over the night sky. It was cloudy and dark. Confusion reigned as the German commanders attempted to instill order in the ranks of the prisoners. It was at this point that Lieutenant Greenblatt made his move.

Spotting an opening in the ranks of the German troops, Joseph broke into a sprint in an attempt to elude his captors by running into the darkness. But the German troops fired. A bullet from a Mauser 7.5 slammed into Greenblatt's hip, bringing him down. He was then overtaken by the pursuing soldiers. Refusing to passively submit to custody, Joe charged into his pursuers. A German trooper smashed Joseph's face with the butt of his rifle and knocked out several teeth. Shocked, pained and bleeding, the lieutenant was dragged and kicked back to the prisoners' assembly point in the soccer field.

After completely disarming the Polish prisoners, the Germans forced them to march into the night to a prisoner of war camp. Throughout the forced march, the conquering Germans jeered and cursed the captives. Any Polish soldier who stepped out of line was immediately shot and

left in the road. If the prisoner was merely wounded, a German officer would deliver the *coup-de-grace* via a bullet in the head. After a brutal five hour trek through the Polish countryside the prisoners and their captors arrived at an unknown assembly point. There the prisoners were loaded onto trucks. Several hours later they entered the prisoner of war camp located at Amitz, Germany. For most of the prisoners, the war was over. For Joseph Greenblatt it had just begun.

## ***ESCAPE #1***

At the prisoner of war camp in Amitz, Germany, Greenblatt was placed in a lazaret, a field hospital, in order to recuperate from the wounds he suffered while attempting to escape after the Battle of Kutno.

After seven weeks in the lazaret, German medics declared Greenblatt ambulatory and released him to a prisoner of war camp erected exclusively for Polish officers. The prisoners were divided into three categories and housed accordingly: The first category consisted of first and second lieutenants, the second category included captains, majors, and colonels, while the third group was composed of generals. The barracks housing the lieutenants were filled and Joseph was lodged with the senior officers.

The Red Cross supplemented the prisoners' diet with deliveries of fruits and vegetables. Discipline was maintained and morale was high. The Polish prisoners exercised daily and Joseph worked out feverishly, thereby maintaining himself in good physical condition.

After only one month in the Amitz POW camp, several high-ranking Polish officers began to explore the possibility of an escape. Joseph Greenblatt was taken into their confidence, despite his junior rank of lieutenant and in spite of the fact that he was a Jew. Lieutenant Greenblatt was known to be a man of ingenuity as well as a courageous fighter; both traits invaluable to prisoners intent on escape.

Six months passed. Finally, the escape plan was organized and put into action. Greenblatt and six other Polish officers chewed several cherries and subsequently coughed up "blood." It was quickly rumored that an outbreak of tuberculosis had occurred among the prisoners and the seven "tuberculosis" victims were isolated in a barrack which was subsequently quarantined.

The German officers in charge of the POW camp were anxious to be rid of the prisoners thought to be diseased. Following procedure, arrangements were made to evacuate the seven TB patients. They were to be transferred to the Central Medical Building for Polish prisoners of war which was located in Poznan, Poland, a city approximately 100 kilometers east of Amitz.

The imprisoned Polish officers were not mistreated. They were provided with sufficient food, shelter and medical attention. However, they were not comfortable with their German captors. The war was going well for Germany. The army was undefeated. Casualties were minimal. Morale was high throughout the Nazi ranks and within the fatherland. The complete conquest of Europe was anticipated. Therefore, a rather benign attitude was maintained by the Nazis, except, of course, towards the Jews.

However, the Polish command anticipated an imminent invasion by England and France, a drive that would inflict numerous casualties upon the Nazis and result in a malignant attitude towards the captured Allies. Disturbed by this possibility, escape of any Polish officers was deemed important.

The Polish underground was already in operation within the country. Contact was established with the senior army officers who were imprisoned in Amitz. An escape was arranged.

It was a 48-hour drive to the Central Medical Building in Poznan. Only three guards were assigned to transport Joseph Greenblatt and six other Polish Army officers. The Germans did not anticipate any difficulties and the Poles were secured inside a truck.

After several hours of driving, the German guards slowed the truck near the city of Gniczno which contained a German military camp where the guards and their prisoners were to

spend the night. At an intersection near Gniezno, however, the truck was stopped by a road block and several members of the Polish underground leaped onto the truck. Two guards were stabbed to death and the third was strangled by the Polish partisans. The seven prisoners were freed, transferred to an unmarked truck, and driven to a camp concealed deep in a forest. Within a couple of days the Polish officers were transported to Warsaw where they were demobilized.

# ***WEAPONS OF WAR***

After his escape from the prison camp, Joseph returned to the apartment of his parents located at #7 Wspolna Street. He sought out his friends from the Betar movement and reestablished his contacts. His availability became known and within a few days he was contacted by Paul Frankl, the local Betar leader and future commander of Zydowski Zwiazek Wojskowy (Jewish Military Union). Frankl explained that the Betar was still in existence and was engaged in training and organization--and stockpiling arms. Arms which were intended for transport to Palestine. Arms for use by the mysterious Hebrew underground group--the Irgun Zvai Leumi.

Frankl arranged to meet Greenblatt early in the morning of the next day. The two comrades made their way, via a circuitous route, to a house located at #23 Nalcwki Street where they were joined by Betar members Elias Halberstam, Severin Livea and Irene Orlich. The group entered the building on Nalcwki Street and walked up several flights to the attic. They walked the length of the attic to a small alcove in the rear where there was a door. They exited through the door and entered the attic of a neighboring building. The group then walked two flights down to an empty apartment and entered. In the rear of the apartment was a bookcase. Frankl pushed the bookcase aside revealing a hidden opening in the wall which led to another apartment. From there the group went up to the attic. In the dim light Joe could ascertain the existence of an arsenal: 10 heavy machine guns, a few light machine guns, several pistols and numerous cases of hand grenades. In addition, several cartons of ammunition were stacked against the wall.

Greenblatt recognized the arms as regulation Polish army equipment. Paul Frankl explained that the guns were originally the property of the Polish army. When the army



surrendered and fled from the Germans, the Polish soldiers discarded the equipment which had been recovered by members of the Betar.

Erroncously confident of the ability of the Western powers to neutralize the Nazi war machine within a short time and, at that point possessing no information regarding the Nazis' implementation of a "final solution," the Betar was planning to ship the appropriated equipment to Palestine. Once there, the arms were to be utilized by the Irgun, now commanded by David Raziel, which was preparing to renew its struggle for independence and would soon launch a war against the British empire. Unfortunately for the Jews of Poland, fate cruelly decreed otherwise-- they were forced to use the arms in their own defense.

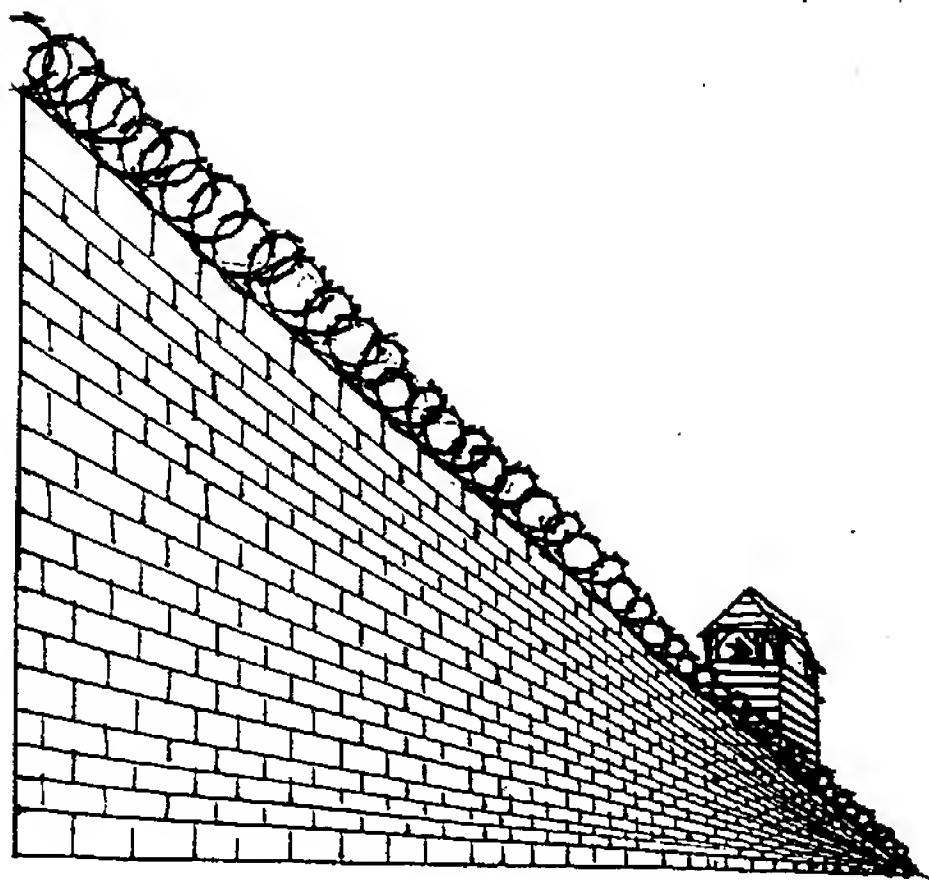
***THE GENOCIDE  
CONVENTION***

On January 20, 1942, a conference was held at Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin. It was arranged by Reinhard Heydrich, SS Gruppenfuhrer, in order to deal with the final solution of the "Jewish Problem." Present at the conference were all of the relevant administrators who were involved in the management of the various ghettos throughout German-controlled territory.

Several avenues of approach to "The Problem" were considered. Hjalmar Schacht, the financial advisor to the Nazi regime, suggested a gradual confiscation of the financial assets of the Jews. Heydrich, himself, initially favored a scheme of imprisonment, ransom, and finally, mass deportation. Production managers felt that the Jews should be utilized for forced labor. Other proposals were discussed and considered: resettlement, segregation, imprisonment, etc.

After extensive deliberation, the solution was finally decided upon by unanimous agreement: extermination. Only the logistics remained for discussion.

# *THE GHETTO*



The individual administratively responsible for the annihilation of the Jews of Poland was Hans Frank, the former Reich Minister and president of the Nazi Academy of Law. He was appointed Governor General of Poland on October 12, 1939, by a decree of Adolf Hitler. This post guaranteed him full powers in the General Government. The Higher SS, the Police Chief and the Secretary of State for Security were subordinate to him.

Frank was administratively in charge of those areas of Poland occupied by Nazi Germany which were not incorporated into the Reich. As a result of Frank's appointed position, he was the primary administrator in charge of the subjugation, persecution and, ultimately, the murder of millions of Poles and Jews.

On November 10, 1939, Governor General Frank issued an order directing all Jews, male and female, to wear a white armband with a blue Star of David. Every Jew from the age of 12 onwards was required to be thusly identified.

Hans Frank's hatred and oppression of the Jews were equaled by his subordinate, Doctor Ludwig Fischer, the district chief in Warsaw. It was Fischer who initially emphasized the construction of a special ghetto for the Jews, a measure enthusiastically approved by the Governor General on November 7, 1939.

The Warsaw ghetto was officially created on October 2, 1940, by a decree issued by Doctor Fischer. The area was completely enclosed by a brick wall 16 kilometers long and 3 meters high which was topped by shards of glass and barbed wire. The entire area was a concentration camp for Jews and for several thousand Poles of Jewish origin, Jews who had severed their connection with Judaism through conversion and intermarriage.

Living conditions were horrendous. The walled ghetto was originally built to contain 50,000 people. Into this already crowded area, the Nazi jammed over 500,000. Several families lived 12 in one room. Many ghetto inhabitants slept in cellars or on rooftops. Tens of thousands were forced to live in the street. A total of 30 percent of Warsaw's population was crammed into 2.4 percent of its area, a population density of 200,000 people per square mile.

Extreme hardship and numerous deaths occurred in the ghetto during the winter of 1941. Thousands starved to death. Additional thousands froze to death. The largest number of dead were infants too weak to cry and the elderly too weak to pray. Typhus and typhoid spread rampantly. Deprived of medical supplies and equipment, Jewish doctors could do little to contain the sickness and disease afflicting multitudes of ghetto inhabitants. And thousands more were rounded up by German troops who shipped the hapless Jews to the gas chambers of Treblinka, Belsen, Maidanek and Auschwitz.

Families placed the bodies of typhoid victims in front of their houses. Greenblatt and other members of his resistance unit would collect the corpses in covered carts and transport them to a cemetery outside the ghetto. On the return trip the carts contained munitions purchased from smugglers and profiteers. The Nazis didn't inspect the carts for fear of contracting the disease.

The Jews were unable to obtain food in the open market and were forced to rely on the Nazis for supplies. However, the German policy was to maintain the inhabitants of the ghetto on the verge of starvation. The Nazi occupation authorities were instructed to provide the Jews with less than half of the daily food allowances necessary to survive. The official daily ration allocated to Jews amounted to 300 calories. On most days the Jews did not even receive this meager

allotment. The Poles were permitted 634 calories each day. And the Poles, unhampered by ghetto restrictions, were able to obtain additional food through bribery, smuggling, clandestine production, etc. The Germans thrived on 2,310 calories.

Jews were not permitted to leave the ghetto. In 1941, the Nazis instituted the death penalty for Jews venturing beyond the walls. Radios were taken away. Telephone lines were removed. Mail was censored and packages were confiscated. The inhabitants of the ghetto were effectively isolated from the outside world.

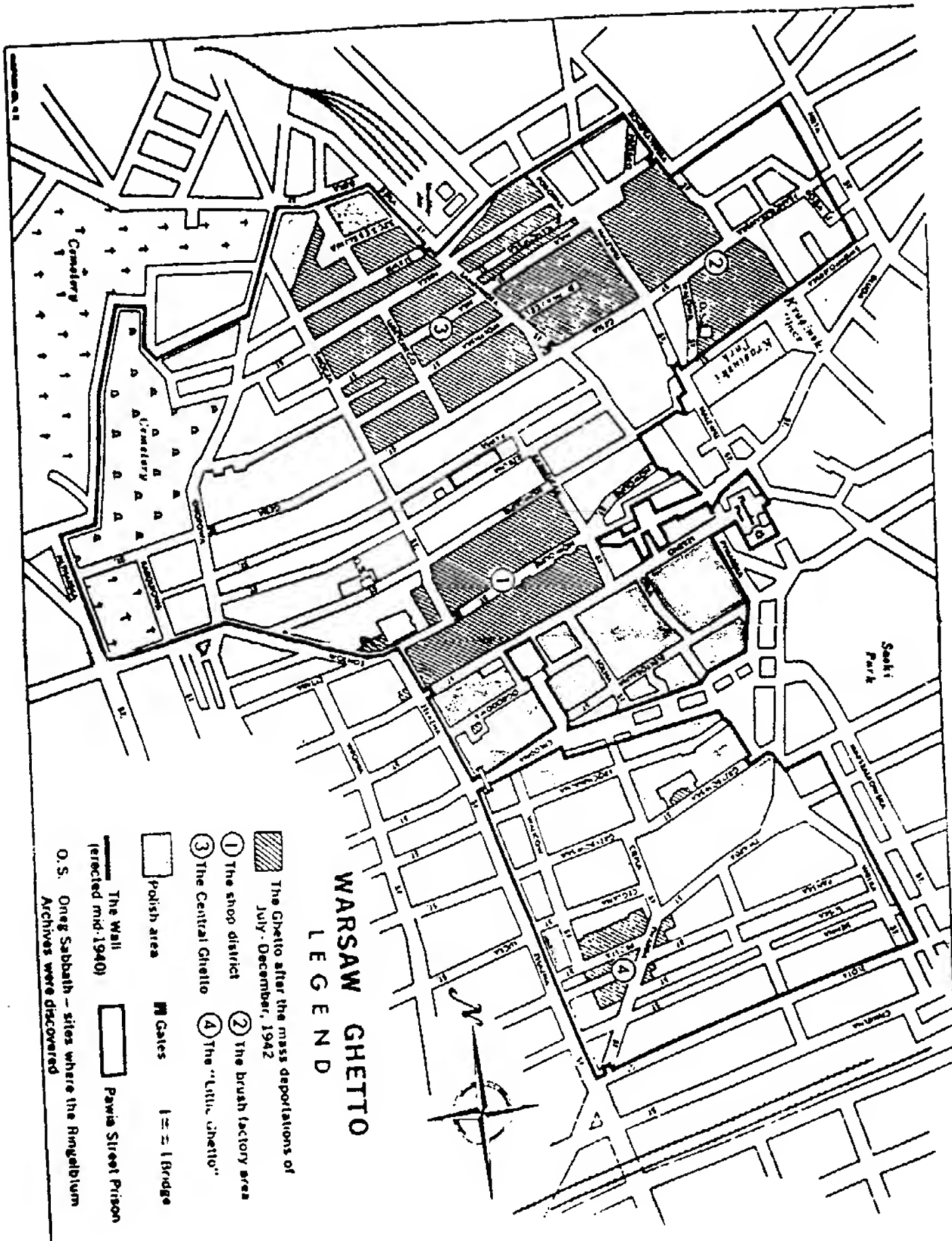
The mass evacuation of Jews from the ghetto commenced on July 22, 1942, the eve of the 9th of Av according to the Hebrew calendar. This is the day on which Jews mourn the destruction of the first and second temples in Jerusalem and the end of their political independence and national hegemony in ancient times. The expulsion continued for 52 days, until September 12th. During the great deportation, some 300,000 thousand Jews were expelled or murdered. 265,000 of them were forcibly taken from the assembly point (*umschlagplatz*) and transported in sealed freight trains which were severely overcrowded and completely lacking in sanitary facilities. In this manner, the captive Jews were transported to the death camps, ultimately to perish in the gas chambers and the crematoria. Another 11,580 Jews were sent to forced labor camps. It is estimated that approximately 8,000 others managed to escape to the Polish area of the city at the height of the deportation. More than 10,000 Jews were murdered in the streets of the ghetto during the forced evacuation. In effect, the large and vital Jewish community of Poland no longer existed. It appeared that the Nazis were effectively dealing with the "Jewish problem."

Only 40,000 Jews remained in the ghetto on that fateful day to come, January 18, 1943...



Beggar in the Warsaw Ghetto. From "In the Warsaw Ghetto"





***THE PASSION OF***  
***IRENE CSAN***

For a Jew living in Poland in 1942, romance was more distant than a fantasy. Fear and apprehension pervaded the ghetto. Each day survived was a personal triumph. Starvation and disease left scores of corpses on the streets of the ghetto every day. Nazi patrols invaded on a daily basis to round up Jews for immediate transportation to 'labor camps.' Normal emotions were blunted and desensitized by the harshness and ferocity of the German occupation. The specter of death was omnipresent and overwhelming. After active military combat, wounded in action, and fearing that he would be felled by typhus, starvation or a one-way trip to a concentration camp, Joseph Greenblatt's only thoughts centered on survival, his own and his family's. This was his world.

The ghetto was not merely overcrowded, it was unbelievably cramped. Living space was difficult to find. Several families shared a small apartment. The Greenblatt family--Joe, his father Israel Samuel, his mother Yetta, his brother Zygmunt, and his sister Helen--finally found a tiny flat on the third floor of Building #14 on Solna Street. The family was able to escape starvation. They maintained themselves by utilizing the savings of the elder Greenblatt. They had shelter. Food was scarce and hard to acquire, but the Greenblatts managed to survive while the ghetto population was being decimated.

The crowded conditions, while painful to endure, serendipitously created one of the very few positive incidents in young Joseph's life. The proximity of the inhabitants of Building #14 initiated many relationships. It was dangerous to wander the streets of the ghetto so the Jews stayed inside. They left their homes only when it was absolutely necessary to obtain food, medical assistance or other essentials. The Greenblatt family developed a close friendship with the family of Jacob and Renee Domb. The families spent a good deal of time together discussing

their mutual problems, their uncertainties and their fears. Soon after the Greenblatts settled into their crowded quarters, they were invited by Renee Domb to visit her family. There they made the acquaintance of the new arrival to reside in their apartment--her younger sister, Irene Csan.

Irene, a petite beauty, had an immediate effect upon Joseph. Inexplicable emotions enveloped him. And she seemed interested. Conversation flowed easily between the two young prisoners of the ghetto.

Hours passed. Members of both families moved about, exchanging casual conversation. Joe and Irene, however, were oblivious to all of this. They spoke only to each other, unaware of those around them in the crowded apartment. This was noticed with interest and concern by the relatives of each. After all, the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942 was definitely the wrong place and the wrong time for a romantic involvement.

Following that first meeting, Joe and Irene spent all of their spare time together. When he was with his beloved, Joseph felt that a new life had been given to him. His previous fatalism was transformed into an unexplainable, and unrealistic, hope. He was energized and fulfilled despite the pall of horror permeating his ghetto prison. Irene felt secure and happy when Joseph held her--inexplicable and unrealistic emotions considering the circumstances in which the young lovers existed. The untimely romance progressed. The beleaguered Jews lived each day to the fullest as best they were able, for they realized that the Holocaust was soon to engulf them. The courtship continued for three months. The ghetto was not constructed in order to provide the usual avenues of leisure. There were no cafes, no night clubs, no restaurants, no movies, no parks. However, despite the horrendous conditions, the Jews managed to produce an occasional concert. Attendance at one of these performances within their three month courtship provided the lovers

with the only distraction from the brutal conditions of their oppressive environment. However, there ultimately was no distraction; only the fear, the uncertainty, the pain, which constantly hovered over the ghetto.

The couple walked the nearly deserted ghetto streets one cloudy night. Only a few other Jews braved the dangerous streets after darkness extinguished the dim light of the evening. SS patrols presented a constant danger. There were no laws protecting Jews. German troops often engaged in shocking brutality. A Jewish couple, man and wife, preceded Joseph and Irene by a block and a half. The woman was obviously pregnant. As they reached an intersection two SS officers appeared in front of them. The Jews tried to step aside, but one SS man unholstered his pistol, pointed it at the woman's swollen belly, laughed, and told her, "Now you will have an early delivery!" He then shot her in the abdomen. She slumped to the ground, dying in agony as her husband knelt to comfort her. The Nazi then shot the husband in the head. The sadistic soldiers walked on, laughing.

Irene froze in fear at the sight of such murderous sadism. She tried to scream but, when she opened her mouth, no sound emerged. Joseph grabbed her, pulled into the cover of the shadows and held her, trembling, for a long time. Irene knew that she would have fainted if not for Joseph's support.

Irene was near hysteria. The murderous incident caused all of her suppressed fears to surface. She had never witnessed murder before and couldn't imagine it occurring with such casual brutality. She begged Joseph to give her some reassurance, some possibility of hope, some opportunity to regain control of their own destiny. Or would the Jews have to passively wait until they were all killed?

Joseph held his beloved close and stroked her hair. He vowed that some day the Jews would strike back. He swore revenge. Revenge for the pregnant woman. Revenge for her husband. Revenge for all the Jews. But he didn't offer any further explanation. And Irene instinctively knew that she should not ask for any.

Irene knew that when Joseph was not with her he was involved in some mysterious activity with other Betar members. Although he maintained security and did not reveal specifics, she surmised that the group was engaged in training for a military showdown. She forced herself, however, to refrain from asking too many questions, questions that she knew Joseph was reluctant to answer. Irene was extremely apprehensive.

When Joseph wasn't involved in training the ZZW underground, smuggling arms, establishing communications, planning battle strategy, he went to Irene. Despite the fear, despite the hunger, despite the uncertainty, the young lovers' passion for each other was maintained at a feverish intensity. They drew pleasure, contentment and strength from their trysts, notwithstanding the realization that war and death might soon cause them to part--forever.

Finally, despite the specter of death perpetually hovering over the ghetto, Joseph and Irene were married on January 10, 1943, eight days before the commencement of hostilities. The ceremony was performed by a schohet – a ritual slaughterer who was skilled at dispatching animals in the prescribed kosher methods. No record was ever filed in any municipality. It wasn't exactly an occasion filled with the typical merriment and cheer accompanying a wedding. The ominous clouds of impending battle loomed over the modest affair and dampened the spirits of the participants and the guests. All were aware that their lives might reach an end within a short time.

In addition to the families of Joe and Irene, several commanders of the ghetto forces were in attendance, including the legendary hero, Mordechai Anielewicz, who was later killed in the battle of the Warsaw Ghetto.

The marriage was consummated on a mattress which was stuffed with hand grenades and ammunition. It wasn't exactly a comfortable night; sardonically, Greenblatt doesn't advise anyone to try it. Shortly after the wedding, Joseph gave up his gold marriage ring. It was melted down and used to purchase arms.

The newlyweds had no honeymoon. They knew that their time together was to be short. Eight days after the marriage, Irene was smuggled out of the ghetto. She was despondent. Her only source of hope, her only vision of a normal future, her only refuge from a world gone mad was her love for Joseph Greenblatt.

For Joseph, the passion of Irene's was more exciting than the explosive battlefield, more stimulating than the anticipation of the impending revolt.

# ***THE FIGHTING GROUPS***



Division along ideological lines plagued Jewish unity. Among Polish Jewry in the 1920s and 1930s, there were several organizations representing the complete spectrum of political opinion. These groups were led by rigid and determined people completely committed to their ideology and their refusal to seriously consider the philosophy of the others. This situation was maintained within the ghetto, resulting in the unfortunate fragmentation of the fighting organizations into several diverse philosophical units. The most prominent organizations which participated in most of the military actions were the Zionist-Socialists and the Zionist-Revisionists.

The Zionist-Socialists comprised the largest bloc of activists and supporters. Their fighting units fought under the banner of Żydowski Organizacja Bojowa, (ZOB), the Jewish Fighting Organization. Their ideology and ideas were rooted in the various Socialist movements emerging throughout Europe. Although many claimed to be Zionists they were more involved in the Marxist theory of class struggle which promised to end poverty and liberate all oppressed people and thus end the problems of the Jews. Most were secular and subordinated their religious backgrounds to their faith in the inevitable Socialist revolution. Bourgeois nationalism was rejected.

The Zionist-Revisionists and Betar members, many with military training and combat experience, formed the second largest group of resistance fighters. They fought as the Żydowski Związek Wojskowy, (ZZW), the Jewish Military Union. Their ideological position was decidedly anti-Socialist. This attitude emanated from the teachings of Jabotinsky who rejected any form of Socialism. Their mottoes for social justice were drawn from the Bible. Marxism was completely disdained. All ideologies were cast aside in order to concentrate on one goal ; Zionism.

All efforts were directed to the mass migration to Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state.

These divisions were maintained among the Jews even after the fall of the ghetto, even during the War of Independence in Palestine, even during the war of survival against the Arab hordes, even today. During the Israeli War of Independence the survivors and supporters of ZOB enlisted and fought with the Haganah, the official military representative of the Jewish Agency. The ZZW adherents supported the tactics of the dissident Irgun, an independent guerrilla organization. Politically, the ZOB ideologists back the left-leaning Mapai party. The ZZW followers stood with the right wing Herut.

The fighting organizations were not united militarily but maintained communication. Each fought within its own sector of defense. Each fought with impressive valor.

# ***THE REALIZATION***

The Rosenfeld brothers, Alexander and Jacob, were Betar members who subsequently enrolled in the ZZW.

The brothers were fortunate to work in the Shultze-Tebbens area of the ghetto. The section was named for Herr Schultze and Herr Tebbens, German civilian entrepreneurs who secured contracts for the manufacture of German army uniforms. Their work force consisted of unpaid Jewish slave laborers. However, within the forced context of the Warsaw ghetto, the assignment was regarded as preferable; these Jews were fed and considered "useful." They were therefore exempt from the deportations to death.

On the eve of April 18th, 1943, Herr Tebbens called a meeting of his shop foremen. Once assembled in the office of the factory, they were told that they would not be allowed to leave for home. Alex Rosenfeld was assigned to guard the door. He had the foresight to arrange for his brother, Jacob, to hide in an area near the factory.

Herr Schultze addressed the assembled Jewish workers. He delivered a shocking pronouncement: "Tomorrow, the ghetto will be liquidated. However, I have received assurance from the SS commander that you, whose work is essential to the victory of the Third Reich, will be spared!"

The astonished Jews were informed that the Schultze and Tebbens workshops and factory would be relocated to the village of Poniatow. Those Jews employed in the establishments would be relocated along with the businesses. They would be permitted to exist as they had been allowed thus far. The rest of the ghetto would be transported to Auschwitz. The shop foremen were ordered to remain in the factory all night. They were forbidden to attempt to communicate with anyone outside.

Alexander Rosenfeld, guarding the door, overheard all of this. Quietly slipping into an empty storeroom, he hurriedly wrote the details of Herr Schultze's directive. Crumpling the paper, Alex tossed it out of a window. It was picked up by brother Jacob who brought it to Joseph Greenblatt. Despite the curfew, Joseph left his apartment, ran through the darkened streets, eluding Nazi patrols, and made his way to ZZW headquarters. He immediately gave the note to Paul Frankl, ZZW Commander. A meeting was soon arranged with Mordechai Anielevitch, Commander of the ZOB. All options were discussed and considered. Finally, the Jewish leaders agreed that only one course of action was available: they decided that the time had come to fight.

## ***THE DECISION***

A day in September, 1942. The Zilberberg brothers were among a crowd of Jews rounded up by the Nazis in the Warsaw ghetto and taken to the railroad station. The German troops formed a tight ring around the captives who were informed that they were about to be transported to a labor camp. They were told that they would be adequately fed and clothed and would work in industrial institutions for the Third Reich. If they performed their assignments with diligence and efficiency they would earn their freedom and be released.

The train pulled into the terminal and the Jews were loaded into cattle cars, so many jammed into each car that it was impossible to move and difficult to breathe. The destination: Maidanek, the notorious death camp. But the Jews didn't know this.

Except for the Zilberberg brothers. They were the last to be herded into the cattle cars. As they were being shoved forward, a sadistic Polish railroad worker, obviously enjoying the predicament of the Jews, called to the brothers and informed them that they were going to a concentration camp where they would be killed. The malicious Pole inadvertently saved the brothers' lives.

The Zilberbergs took the Pole seriously and were determined to escape. To the amazement of the rest of the confined Jews, they made their way, with great difficulty, to an area of the cattle car in which a high window was located. One brother hoisted the other until he could reach the window, which he broke open. Despite the movement of the train, he leaped out and was soon followed by his brother, who was lifted to the window by other Jews. Miraculously, the brothers were not injured. They hid in a field all day and returned to the ghetto by nightfall. The fugitives furtively made their way to an apartment in Muranowska 7, the headquarters of the ZZW.

The Zilberberg brothers related the events to several grim faced men including David Wdowinsky, Paul Frankl, Nathan Schultz, Michael Strykowski, Joseph Greenblatt, and a man named Bielawski, all members of the high command of the underground.

The ZZW leadership evaluated the information provided by the Zilberberg brothers and, after comparing it with the mass roundup, the brutality, the enclosure of the Jewish living space, and other reports of escapees, came to the conclusion that the Germans intended to liquidate the Jews of Poland.

Commander Wdowinsky, pre-war president of the Zionist Revisionist Organization of Poland and a distinguished psychiatrist before the war, met with representatives of the Jewish Council, a group appointed by the Nazis. He presented the evidence indicating that the Germans intended to destroy the remnant of Jewry living in Warsaw. However, he was defied by Dr. Ignatius Schipper, a former member of the Polish parliament who now indulged his fantasies of importance by playing out his role as a member of the Jewish Council. Schipper heard the evidence from Wdowinsky. The Revisionist leader explained that the Betar organization had stockpiled weapons which were secreted within the ghetto and which could readily be made available. He stressed the need for defensive training and organization. Another suggestion involved the formation of a committee consisting of representatives from the various Zionist and self-defense groups. Time was running out. The Jewish inhabitants of Warsaw would be destroyed.

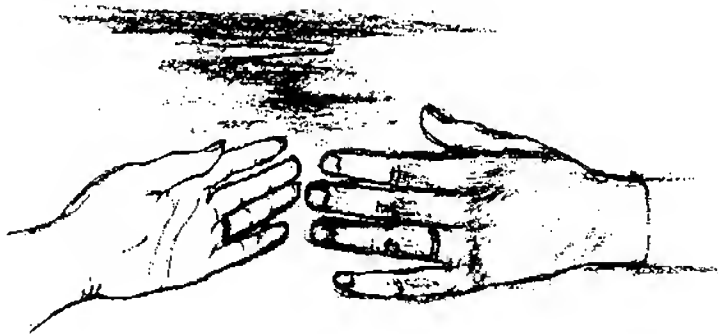
Schipper, a member of one of the leftist Zionist groups, imperiously replied that the right wing Zionists had always been "hotheads." No one appointed them to positions of leadership such as that occupied by him, Schipper. They should have confidence in him and accept his



authority. To assuage their concern and impress them with this position of prestige and importance, he revealed that he had received “personal assurance from Governor General Hans Frank,” his former classmate, that no further harm would be visited upon the Jews.

The Zionist Revisionist leadership did not consult with Dr. Schipper any longer. Realizing he was a pompous fool who was so impressed by his superficial relationship with his Nazi masters that he deliberately blinded himself to the imminent Holocaust, the Betar organization completely ignored him. They began to recruit more people, engaged in weapons and self-defense training, stockpiled food and ammunition, and set up outposts which were to be used as defensive positions in the future. Joseph Greenblatt was in charge of weapons instruction as a result of his military training and experience. When the crucial time arrived, at least some Jews would be ready to fight.

# ***FORCED ESTRANGEMENT***



Practicality had to take precedence over passion. Despite her entreaties to remain with Joseph, her husband, and to share whatever fate would occur, Joseph insisted that Irene leave the ghetto. There was no reason for both to die. And Irene had no military training; she would be of no use in the inevitable fight. She finally agreed to leave. But how?

Joseph had carefully cultivated a relationship with a middle-aged German guard, a veteran of World War I. The German didn't appear to be infected with the virulent hatred common to most of the enemy troops. He was willing to talk to the Jews and accepted small "favors" from time to time. Irene was introduced to him as a Polish Christian who was a "friend" of Greenblatt, but a woman who decided that the potentially hazardous ghetto conditions mandated relocation to a safer section of the city. Accepting a bottle of vodka, the sympathetic guard allowed Irene to pass through the lightly guarded checkpoint to safety. She quickly made her way through the streets of Warsaw to an apartment on Zlota Street where she was sheltered by her sister and brother-in-law, Jacob Domb. Shortly thereafter she was moved to the village of Zalesie where she lived with the Lenczewsky family, decent Polish Christians who protected her.

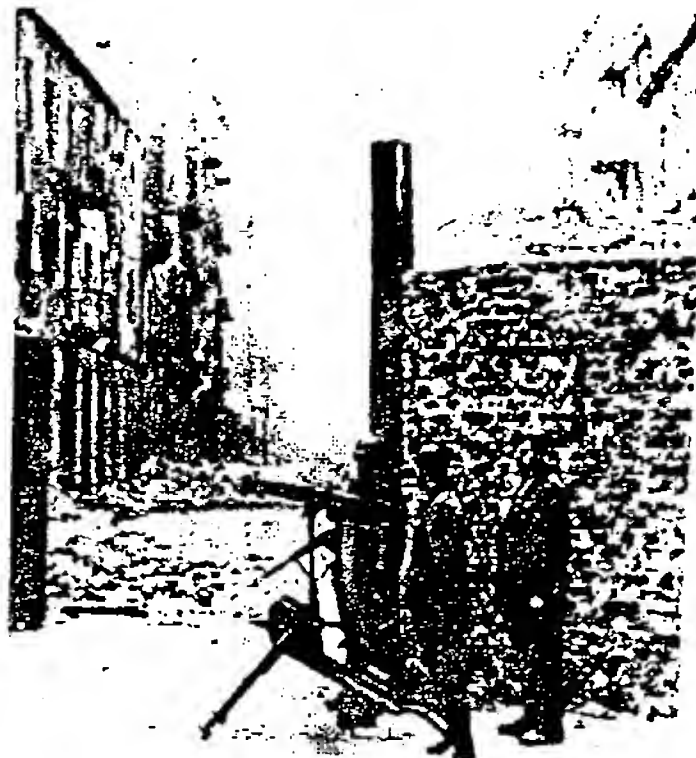
The newlyweds were devastated. Their love for each other was so fierce. Their time together was so short. Although neither dared to voice their apprehension, both Joseph and Irene believed that they would never see each other again.

And within a few days the uprising began. The explosive gunfire could be heard throughout Warsaw. All of the Poles were discussing the battle-- in the streets, in the shops and in their homes. Irene was alone; a tragic, forlorn and depressed woman. Each time she heard a shell explode, or the crack of a rifle, she imagined that her husband was the targeted victim.

Although her relatives were attentive and supportive, Irene was depressed and inconsolable, praying constantly for the survival of her husband.

In another time, in another place, Irene would be enjoying her honeymoon. But that would have been in another world, a world which no longer existed.

# ***THE BATTLE OF THE WARSAW GHETTO***



Dispersed among alien lands and hostile populations for over 18 centuries, the Jews suffered constant persecution, discrimination, debasement, and murder, barely surviving ghettos, pogroms, crusades, inquisitions and, finally, the Holocaust. They chose an inopportune time and a formidable opponent to stage the first armed Jewish revolt since the fall of Bar Kochba in 135 C.E and their dispersal throughout the world.

The German army appeared invincible. Brilliantly commanded, superbly trained and completely equipped, it was, thus far, unstoppable. It's firepower overwhelmed the armed forces of the modern European nations. It appeared to be absurd for the Jews to engage in an uprising against the most powerful military force in the world. However, the Jews fought back. Outnumbered, outgunned, sick, starving, racked by disease, they attacked. The Jews challenged the Nazis to firefights and direct clashes. After a non-stop three-day battle, a retreat was called-- by the Nazis. When the German forces returned to the ghetto with tanks, planes, armored vehicles, flame throwers, and scores of fresh troops, the Jews battled them to a standstill and then forced their retreat. Driven by courage generated from desperation, the Jews resisted longer than the armies of the major European powers. When the Jewish fighters, their ranks decimated by the battle, ran out of ammunition, they continued to fight with rocks, sticks, pails of boiling water and, finally, their bare hands.

# ***THE FIRST SKIRMISH***

January 18th, 1943. Four companies of SS Storm Troopers--800 men--marched into the ghetto. The announced pretense was to enlist factory workers for transportation to labor camps. However, the Jews had finally realized that the transports were not a trip to labor but a voyage of death.

The Jewish fighters, including Greenblatt, rose from concealment and opened fire. The SS men took cover while their commanders organized a counterattack. A fierce battle raged for three days. Finally, the Germans commanders ordered their troops to withdraw.

After the initial skirmish, both sides engaged in concentrated efforts to prepare for an all-out showdown fight. The Jews had already constructed underground bunkers with a series of connecting tunnels. They manufactured and smuggled arms and stockpiled food and medical supplies. They reinforced their positions and increased the intensity of training and recruitment. The Germans organized over 2,000 soldiers, three detachments of artillery and sappers, two battalions of German police, 360 soldiers and officers of the Polish Police, and their battalion of the auxiliary formation of the SS. The attacking force was fully equipped with all of the essential armaments for modern warfare.

The Jews knew that the Germans would return in full force and throw everything that they had into the battle. The Nazis were enraged at the stiff Jewish resistance and the rout of the SS troops. The Jewish leadership, carefully assessing their supplies and manpower, felt that they could withstand a second assault for only 24 hours. However, the determined fighters managed to maintain fierce opposition which lasted longer than the regular mechanized armed forces of Poland, Greece, Holland, Norway, France.....



The Nazi leader of the initial armed activity was Oberst von Sammern. He was stunned and confused by the Jewish resistance and appeared incapable of commanding the activity of the attacking troops. Embarrassed by the forced retreat of the SS, by the Ghetto fighters, the action was placed under the overall command of General Jurgen Stroop, a career officer with combat experience in two wars--on the French front and on the Soviet front. In addition, the general had recent experience in combating insurgent Soviet Partisans in the Eastern Ukraine. He was a professional soldier, efficient and ruthless.

Upon examining the reports of the initial action in the ghetto and the disorderly retreat of the Nazi forces, General Stroop realized that the insurrection was more than a desperate effort by a disorganized rabble. It was a meaningful revolt by well trained and fiercely determined Jews. Jews with guns.

Stroop mapped out his strategy: he surrounded the walled ghetto with SS troops, Polish Police and Ukrainian Fascists, totalling over 5,000 fighters. He brought up artillery, howitzers, planes and tanks. The attack commenced. The non-stop pounding, bombing and flames destroyed much of the ghetto structure. Under cover of the artillery barrage and the bombers, the ground attack began. The Nazi troops entered the ghetto. The date was April 19, 1943.

# ***STREET OF FIRE***

The fighting in the ghetto was into the third day. The Nazis were baffled by the fierce resistance of Jewish fighters. General Stroop personally directed his troops and conducted the battle as he would have done against an organized, combat-trained army, writing daily reports and, ultimately, receiving Germany's highest military honor, the Iron Cross.

Greenblatt was in charge of a group of 30 fighters, 22 men and 8 women. His assignment was to block the Nazis penetrating the area under his command known as the Schultz-Tebbens Territory. For the first two days his group saw no action as the German forces assaulted the central area of the ghetto. Greenblatt and his fighters could not cross over to assist the units repulsing the Nazi attack. When dawn broke on the third day of warfare the Nazis launched a concentrated assault on Greenblatt's position. A large detachment of Ukrainian SS troops marched through the gates at Leszno Street. They were followed by a battalion of the Nazi Waffen SS, elite fighting troops. ZZW sentries spotted the enemy coming down Leszno Street, turning into Karmelicka Street, and heading directly towards Greenblatt's forces. He decided to make a stand at Building #5 on Karmelicka Street and ordered his fighters to the roof of the five story apartment house. The Jews were armed with rifles and pistols and, significantly, a large quantity of hand grenades and molotov cocktails--bottles filled with gasoline which, when fused, would spread flames over several yards when the containers were smashed.

The Nazi and Ukrainian troops moved carefully as they made their way down Karmelicka Street. When they came within range Joe ordered his detachment to open fire. A hail of bullets slammed into the enemy ranks.

The Nazis and Ukrainians quickly took cover leaving their dead and wounded exposed on the street. The well-trained Germans soon pinpointed the origins of the Jewish ambush and

concentrated their fire at the ZZW fighters on the roof. The firefight continued for almost a half hour. The German commander realized that it would be extremely difficult to dislodge the Jews from their position. He directed a frontal assault in order to reach and enter the building. From there, his troops would rush to the roof and overwhelm the fighters.

As the enemy advanced, Greenblatt understood their strategy and ordered the fighters under his command to continue sniping while he and Zipporah Sapcik lit the wicks of the molotov cocktails.

The Germans charged Building #5. Several soldiers rushed towards the entrance while other Nazis opened fire to cover the assault. Greenblatt ordered the Jews to open up with everything they had. The Jews discontinued sniping and began to rapid-fire their rifles and pistols. The Nazis advanced slowly but the soldiers kept coming forward. Greenblatt threw a grenade which exploded in their midst. This was followed by an exploding molotov cocktail thrown by Zipporah Sapcik which landed in the same area spewing flaming gasoline over several soldiers. The Nazis' screams encouraged the Jewish fighters. Joseph and Zipporah continued their explosive barrage; first a grenade, then a cocktail, another grenade, another cocktail...

The flaming liquid spreading all over the street created a bizarre effect. This section of Warsaw's streets was paved with wooden blocks. After several of the gasoline bombs exploded on them, the wood began to burn, creating a wall of fire, and the heat reached a temperature of 5,000 degrees. Joseph and Zipporah continued to fling grenades and cocktails into this inferno which caused the flames to rise several feet in the air. Throughout this assault the Jewish riflemen continued to fire. The battle lasted almost four hours. The Nazis and Ukrainians suffered several

casualties and backed off. The Jews then abandoned the battle scene and escaped via a preplanned route through Nowolipie Street.

## ***THE NEXT DAY***

The German commanders were furious. Their forces were repulsed by a handful of Jews who were desperately outgunned. With the arrival of daybreak the Nazis attacked again. The Jews were waiting. The assault by troops was preceded by an artillery barrage. The Jewish defenders entrenched in cellars and sewers. This time the enemy was more cautious. As the Nazis came down Karmelicka Street the Jewish lookouts were amazed by the size and composition of the attacking force. Hundreds of well-armed soldiers were following a tank.

The Nazis had discarded their arrogance after tasting the firepower and the desperation of the Jewish fighters the previous day. The soldiers, advancing behind the tank, crouched low and stayed close to the walls as they advanced. As they reached the ZZW positions on Karmelicka, the tank opened fire with its cannon and machine guns. Likewise, the foot soldiers began to spray the area with bullets.

Suddenly, the Jews counterattacked. Firing from roof tops and windows they pinned down the soldiers. The ZZW fighters were well trained and fired accurately. The German tank was ordered to advance and move forward to the Jewish positions where it attempted to break through. Greenblatt led a detail which charged the tank. Molotov cocktails were thrown at point blank range and shattered against the tank, creating a flaming coffin for the crew. With the tank disabled, the Jewish fighters concentrated all of their firepower upon the enemy troops. Faced with the ferocity of the Jewish resistance and demoralized by the destruction of the tank, the German forces again withdrew.

***JOSEPH GREENBLATT***

***SPEAKS***

***II***



"I heard the sound of the action in the area where the Germans concentrated their attacks. My unit couldn't reach the area so we waited. We waited for two full days during which we made good use of our time. We trained. We fortified our positions. We made sure that our retreat routes were clear and available. As we heard the sound of the cannons and the machine guns being used against our comrades we also heard the sound of the pistol shots and the grenades exploding as the Jews fought back. This gave us encouragement, as we knew that our people were holding their own.

"I can't say that I was completely free of fear. I had been in combat when I was an officer in the Polish army but that was no comparison to fighting in the ghetto. In the army, I was accompanied by hundreds of uniformed and trained soldiers. We had plenty of military equipment. At least we had a chance. In the ghetto we were completely outgunned and overwhelmingly outnumbered. We knew that death was waiting to claim us. We were fighting not for victory but for honor...and for revenge.

"But courage isn't measured by a lack of fear. All reasonable people have fear when confronted by an enemy they have no chance of defeating and who declares his intentions to destroy you. Courage is measured by the ability to overcome your fear and to confront the adversary with all of your strength and skill. This is the real test of courage. And our fighters in the ghetto passed that test.

"They came for us every day. They had the equipment and the firepower. They were charging and we'd open up on them. We gave it everything we had. When we had to withdraw, they would overrun our positions. This was during the day, but they would withdraw when it got dark. They were afraid of what they couldn't see. When they left, we came back to our

positions. We rebuilt our barracks, tended our wounded. We prayed for darkness. We welcomed the night.”

# ***SURPRISE ATTACK***

German army uniforms, damaged in training or action, were shipped to the Warsaw Ghetto which contained a garment factory. It was worth the transportation cost inasmuch as the repair work was done by the slave labor of Jewish tailors. Hundreds of repaired uniforms, bearing the insignia of all ranks, were packaged and stacked for shipment to units of the German army. The clothing was stored on the loading docks of the Schultze-Tebbens factory in the heart of the ghetto.

Shortly after the uprising began, Joseph Greenblatt led a squad of ZZW fighters to the clothing factory and confiscated dozens of German uniforms, in full repair, which were ready for conveyance to army quartermasters. The Jewish raiders put the clothing to a different use; it was worn by Jews who ambushed Nazis.

Greenblatt, dressed in the uniform of an SS captain, led a group of 34 Jewish fighters clothed in German uniforms denoting various ranks. The "Germans" marched in perfect army formation down Nowlipie Street toward Karnelike Street where a battalion of Ukrainian SS troops were searching for Jews. The SS commandant, apprehensive over the prospect of an ambush by Jews concealed behind the rubble, was gratified to acquire the assistance of a "Nazi" patrol. He briskly walked towards Joseph and saluted. Greenblatt returned the salute calling out, in German, "Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler," responded the commandant, "We've been searching the area for almost an hour looking for Jews. No. Luck. Do you have any ideas where the Jews might be?"

"Right here, you bastard!" Joseph shouted. He whipped out his pistol and shot the Ukrainian murderer.

Greenblatt's fighters immediately opened up and blasted the enemy troops who began to run for cover. A prolonged firefight ensued. The Jews, utilizing their knowledge of the area, were able to evade the Ukrainian troop concentrations and encircle them. Grenades were lobbed into the Ukrainian entrenchments causing several casualties. After a five hour battle the Ukrainians withdrew. The Jews emerged unscathed.

# ***COLLAPSE OF THE GHETTO***



General Jurgen Stroop was enraged and frustrated by the fury of the Jewish resistance. But he was no fool. Disciplined by years of military training, he suppressed his frustration and the instinct to maintain the frontal assaults which were causing so many German casualties. Nazi troops were withdrawn. Armor was brought up and the ghetto was ringed with heavy artillery.

The big guns were opened up on the Jews. There was no random firing. Artillery shells systematically blasted the buildings, block by block, reducing the ghetto to huge mounds of debris and fire. Additional damage was wreaked by Heinkel bombers saturating the area with incendiary bombs. The flames turned the night into day, depriving the ghetto defenders of their previous advantage--conducting surprise attacks and then disappearing into the darkness of the night.

When the artillery and bombing barrage was finally halted, Nazi infantry troops and armor entered the ghetto. Flame throwers were used to burn down the ghetto, building by building. Many Jews perished in the burning houses. Others leaped from the flaming buildings and landed on pavements where their burned and broken bodies were finished off with bullets fired by the advancing Germans.

Throughout the fierce bombardment, Greenblatt and his remaining fighters huddled in underground bunkers, moving from position to position through tunnels which withstood the constant explosions. Although the Jewish casualties mounted, Joseph Greenblatt managed to avoid serious physical injury. Not content to just stay alive, he led besieged and bloodied remnants of his command on sniping expeditions; they would fire on Nazi patrols, bringing down a few of the enemy, and disappear into the tunnels amidst the ruins.

Most of the Jewish fighters were dead or captured. The few remaining were nearing exhaustion. Food supplies ran out and the water was contaminated. Breathing was difficult due to the pervasive flames throughout the ghetto and the poison gas pumped in by the Germans. The Jews could not replace their fallen troops, and fresh supplies could no longer be smuggled in. The enemy was effectively closing in, destroying potential hiding places with explosives and sweeping the area with flame throwers. The Jews' ammunition was rapidly running out.

At this point, Commander Greenblatt assessed the situation and concluded that further resistance would be futile and ineffective. He assembled the ragged remnants of his valiant fighters and explained that three choices remained: to resist to the end and die in the flaming ghetto, to escape and continue the battle at another time and another place, or to surrender.

Surrender was completely unthinkable and further resistance was deemed ineffectual and useless. The unanimous decision--escape!

\* \* \* \* \*

Throughout the ghetto battle, the Jewish fighters broadcast accounts of the fighting and desperately appealed to the Polish forces for assistance. Their pleas went unanswered. The Polish military refused to intervene and several Polish citizens viewed the unequal conflict from balconies or rooftops on the buildings adjacent to the ghetto. Many thought it a delightful show which was finally ridding Poland of its "Jewish problem." They had no inkling, when vital assistance was denied to the Jewish rebels, of the ominous portent awaiting their own rebellion.

Starvation, disease, expenditure of ammunition, and the awesome casualty rates of the besieged fighters signaled the inevitable collapse of the Jewish resistance. The overwhelming firepower and legions of German troops were finally able to overrun and destroy the ghetto. The



Nazis expended more artillery shells in the battle against the bedraggled Jews than in the invasion of Warsaw which was defended by the Polish Army.

The fires continued to burn, destroying all semblance of what was once a city within a city that subsequently became the sight of an historic battle. Buildings collapsed as the flames voraciously devoured the remnants of wood and brick. Finally, only a thick haze of smoke draped over the heaps of rubble and the smoldering embers were all that remained of the ghetto.

Although the Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto was relatively insignificant in the context of World War II, a war which resulted in the deaths of tens of millions, the uprising represented a significant point in Jewish history. For the first time in over 1,800 years, the Jews fought under their own battle flag. Outnumbered and outgunned, the ragged, sick, starving Jews of the ghetto were imbued with the military spirit of their ancestors--Joshua and David, Barak and Bar Kochba, Judah and the Maccabees. The ghetto fighters literally rose from the ashes to battle the Nazis. Although the German troops eventually overwhelmed the ghetto, the Jews never surrendered. No white flags of shame flew over the ghetto ruins.

No gesture of defeat was manifested by the gallant Jewish fighters. There was no acknowledgment of enemy supremacy. The defiant warriors hoisted the emblems of freedom: the flag of Poland and the banner of Zion, the symbol of hope for the Jews throughout their endless wandering.

The world took little notice of the Jewish revolt. It amounted to no more than a minor skirmish within the scope of a war which engulfed Europe and Asia. It was, however, noted with significance by diverse factions: Colonel Adolf Eichmann, the man responsible for the operation

of the murder camps, indicated that a chill of fear swept over Germany upon hearing the news of the ghetto uprising. Josef Goebbels, ranked second to Hitler in the Nazi hierarchy, was apprehensive enough to note in his diary, "It shows what is to be expected of the Jews when they are in possession of arms." (Louis P. Lochner, ed., *The Goebbels Diaries*, 1948, page 351)

Allied commanders noted the battle inasmuch as it demonstrated that the Nazi military machine could actually be repulsed by determined forces. The German army had previously sliced through opposing divisions which mounted little resistance and inflicted few casualties. The ferocious exhibition of the Jewish fighters proved that Hitler's troops could be defeated by well equipped soldiers--and determined opposition.

The ability to effectively conduct a sustained fight against an enemy force many times their size with many times their firepower, was also noted by Jews; Jews in concentration camps. Jews in Europe...especially by Jews in Palestine.



Photo by [unreadable] for [unreadable]

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General Jurgen Stroop, exulting in his hard-won victory over the wretched Jews, wrote a 75 page report describing the ghetto fight as a major military operation. He was awarded the Iron Cross--Germany's highest military honor--by Adolph Hitler. Stroop proudly exhibited his medal, confident of his glorified place in German military history.

But Stroop's joy did not last very long. Captured after the war, he received the death sentence by an American court at Dachau on March 22, 1947, for the murder of Greek hostages. He was subsequently extradited to Poland where he was tried for the murder of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. The death sentence was again pronounced. Stroop was hanged on September 8, 1951, in the area which was once the Warsaw Ghetto. The Nazi general began his own trip to hell.



General Jurgen Stroop in jail

## ***ESCAPE #2***

Hiding amidst the ruins. Sleeping under rubble. Foraging for food like the rats that competed with the Jews for the few rotting bits of edibles scattered throughout the debris. The ghetto fires still burned. Human and animal flesh continued to decay. In addition to the unimaginable harshness of the conditions of the ruined ghetto, there was the constant danger of Nazi patrols. Many German commanders retained furious resentment towards the Jewish resistance; resistance which sent several comrades back to the Fatherland in wooden boxes; resistance which undermined their military careers. The Nazi troops were happy when they were able to shoot at a stray Jew digging in the contamination for something of substance. This was the constant reality confronted by Joseph Greenblatt and his surviving fighters. Still, they fought; sometimes in firefights, other times hand to hand. Life was brutal. Survival was unlikely.

Easter Sunday, 1943. The ghetto was reduced to a smoking ruin composed of destroyed buildings, huge piles of rubble, decomposing bodies, rotting garbage, the twisted wreckage of destroyed tanks, and useless war material. Most Jewish resistance was effectively terminated by the Nazi war machine. Their fighters fallen, their ammunition exhausted, deprived of their remaining food and water, the Jewish survivors decided to withdraw from the ghetto.

Liaison was established with Henry Iwanski, an officer in the Polish military underground who was sympathetic to the ghetto fighters. He maintained contact with the ZZW and assisted the organization. Through Iwanski, an escape route was arranged through the sewers beneath Warsaw. The Jews were directed to a sewage exit at which point Polish partisans would assist in their evacuation.

Entering the sewer system at Karmelicka Street, which connected to the section of the city beyond the ghetto wall, Joseph Greenblatt, along with 15 others, began a tortuous march.

Stumbling through rotten sewage which at times reached their shoulders, the Jews plodded on. The area was thick with contaminated sewage gas. Breathing was extremely difficult. Vomiting further reduced the strength of the fugitives. Some lost their footing in the blackened, putrefied passages and drowned in the rotting slime. Others succumbed to poison gas which was periodically pumped in by the nazis. Finally, after a horrifying five hour trek, four exhausted survivors, including Joseph, dragged themselves to a sewer opening on the “Aryan” side at Wolska Street, where they were met by Polish partisans and loaded into a truck. The ragged survivors were transported to the village of Michalin, approximately a half hour’s travel from Warsaw. There they were sanitized and fed and they rested overnight. In the morning they went their separate ways. A little more than 24 hours after his dramatic escape, Joseph Greenblatt, provided with money and forged identification papers by the partisans, traveled back to Warsaw. His new name: Jan Bednarcik. His destination: the Polish underground. His obsession: vengeance.

***JOSEPH GREENBLATT***  
***SPEAKS***  
***III***



“We had to escape. We had no choice. We had no more food, no more water. We were almost out of ammunition. We could hardly breathe. And we couldn’t sleep. Some of our people had nothing left to fight with except their bare hands and that’s what they fought with-- against heavily armed soldiers and tanks.

“But now we had to accept the inevitable. No one was coming to assist us. The battle was lost. But we never surrendered. We didn’t raise our hands above our heads. We never raised a white flag.

“We fought like men against the best they threw against us. And despite our conditions, not enough equipment, lacking manpower, food, water, medicine, we attacked. We held them and pushed them back.”

# ***THE MONUMENT***

Constructed of bronze and granite, the impressive statue stands thirty feet high symbolizing the heroic resistance of the Jewish fighters.

The monument has an ironic history: The granite was originally purchased from the quarries of Sweden by Adolf Hitler. Der Fuhrer commissioned a Nazi sculptor to create a statue commemorating the triumphant conquest of Poland. The completed statue was to be placed in Warsaw. However, the German victory was short lived. Nazi casualties were enormous and their armies eventually withdrew.

After the war, the Jewish committee in Poland elected to construct a permanent tribute to the gallant fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto. Swedish Jews acquired the granite and transported it to Paris where Nathan Rappaport, a Polish Jew, sculpted the impressive symbol of Jewish resistance.

Exactly five years from the commencement of the Jewish uprising the magnificent statue was unveiled on the exact location where the battle of the Warsaw Ghetto began.



Warrior Ghosts Monument by Nathan Rapoport



The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is commemorated in a stamp issued by Poland, left, and Israel.

## *Israel, Poland to issue Warsaw Ghetto stamp*

Stamps commemorating the battle of the Warsaw ghetto were issued by Israel and Poland on the 50th anniversary of the uprising. The stamps depict a partisan fighter against a background of ghetto rubble.

# ***THE EXECUTION***

Boiling with hatred and thirsting for revenge, Joseph Greenblatt soon discovered an avenue in which to channel his combative energy; he enlisted in the mysterious Polish Armia Krajowa. Combat experience, linguistic ability and weapons expertise facilitated his enrollment.

A recruit's past was carefully examined. Several questions were asked, and the answers had better be right. The requirements: complete dedication to the cause of Polish Freedom, the fulfillment of orders with no questions asked, a willingness to give his life and...to kill upon command. These were passionately accepted by the former army fighter...the street fighter...the ghetto fighter...

The armed resistance movement in Poland was a major military factor in the anti-Nazi coalition. Several groups formed a resistance organization which was dominated by the Armia Krajowa, a right wing political and military organization under the supreme command of General Rowecki. At the end of 1942, the Armia Krajowa structured the tactics of armed struggle by expanding subversion activities and self defense as well as organizing attempts on the lives of Nazi officials and Polish collaborators. In the Spring of 1943, the A. K. set about organizing partisan units which would form the nuclei for the future insurgent regiments. The operations expanded, especially in the area of sabotage and subversion against the German operated industries and railways. Special squads were engaged in sabotage against the German arms industry. Military training and underground arms production were going ahead at an intensive pace.

During the first six months of 1944 the Armia made intensive preparation for insurgency. In addition, the day-to-day actions included railroad sabotage, military operations and political

intelligence. The organization liquidated several high ranking Nazis and informers. In the years 1940-1944 the A.K. executed 5,733 Nazis and collaborators.

An anonymous messenger appeared at Greenblatt's door on a June day in 1943, identified himself as belonging to the Armia, and gave a secret code word. Joseph was then summoned to a meeting that night in the basement apartment of #45 Nowi Swiat Street in Warsaw. He appeared at the designated time and joined a contingent of 10 other men. There was no mutual acknowledgment, no sign of recognition. The less known about each other the better--in case of capture no one would be identified, not even under torture. The group was addressed by a man known only as "Captain Stefan." He related that the Armia's intelligence section determined that Chief of Gestapo Kuchera, appointed only two days earlier, would be on the Poniatowsky Bridge at 2:00 PM the next afternoon. The assignment: kill him.

The newly appointed Gestapo leader was a man whose reputation for savagery preceded his assignment to Warsaw. He proudly proclaimed his devotion to violence. Under his command, citizens of occupied territories were tortured and slain for the flimsiest of reasons, regardless of the extent of their guilt, or even if they were innocent. Gestapo Chief Himmler assigned Kuchera the special task of "pacifying" Warsaw, the principal city in which the Polish underground operated. Kuchera immediately established an operation of terror and murder. On his orders, the Germans shot 1,300 Poles in 34 public executions throughout Poland and arrested another 7,000. Kuchera thus earned for himself the sobriquet, "The Hangman," and was sentenced to death by the underground tribunal of the Armia Krajowa. The order to carry out the sentence was given to a unit which included Jan Bednarcik, the *nom de guerre* of Joseph Greenblatt.



The assassins made their way, one by one, the next day to the apartment of a man known only as Jacek, located at #7 Jerusalem Avenue. At that time, arms were distributed and positions assigned. Greenblatt was issued a 9 mm Wista automatic pistol and several hand grenades. He was placed in charge of a five-man unit which was assigned to cover the escape. The assassins walked singly or in twos, taking different routes, finally traveling down the Avenue Trzeci Maia (3rd of May) to the viaduct leading to the Poniatowski Bridge. Defensive positions were taken. Wlalat, who was chosen to do the actual shooting, walked towards the center of the bridge, accompanied by three others. All were dressed in the uniforms of Gestapo officers. Joseph Greenblatt and his squad maintained their positions.

Joseph knew the odds were against his survival. This was no ordinary mission, no-hit-and-run firefight, no quick kill in the late darkness, no sniper fire from a place of concealment. This was an assassination attempt which, if successful, would reverberate throughout Europe. Gestapo chiefs were well guarded. Attempts on their lives resulted in swift and brutal reprisals.

Danger wasn't foreign to Greenblatt. Combat activity with the Polish army, the Ghetto battles, partisan action...they had constituted the major part of his life for the past several years. Sometimes apprehension enveloped him as he prepared for action. However, once the involvement in combat commenced, all tension disappeared. The only emotions felt by the fighter were the numbness of his nerves and a fierce determination to succeed. And even if he didn't survive this mission, Joseph Greenblatt was determined that he would not die alone, that he'd take at least one Nazi to hell.

Wlalat walked with the confidence of the conqueror. At exactly 2:00 PM, a Gestapo contingent appeared on the far side of the bridge. Several junior officers walked to the center and

cleared all traffic in order to facilitate Kuchera's stroll. Wlalat passed the contingent of Gestapo guards, saluting and calling out "Heil Hitler" in perfect German. When he came to within a few feet of Kuchera, Wlalat drew his pistol and blasted the Nazi police chief and two bodyguards, killing all three. Wlalat then turned and ran towards Joseph Greenblatt who quickly moved forward to cover the triggerman's retreat. Greenblatt and the others threw their grenades and opened fire. Wlalat had almost reached them when he caught a bullet in the back, pitched forward and died. Greenblatt and his comrades kept firing as they ran back down the steps which led to Czerwonego Street (Red Cross Street), where they split up and ran along several side streets. It appeared that their escape succeeded. That was wrong.

The sirens of Gestapo vans filled the streets with an eerie and terrifying sound. Loudspeakers blared an ominous message: "Achtung! Halten! Everyone stop where you are. Anyone attempting to run will be shot."

Police wagons seemed to materialize from every street. All exits were blocked. People halted as ordered. Nazi troops approached and began shoving people into the wagons. Joseph Greenblatt knew that he had to think quickly and maintain his composure. He carried a pistol and two grenades; if these possessions were discovered he was lost. As he stood waiting for the detachment of police moving towards him, he observed one of his Polish companions, who had participated in the execution, lose his nerve. The man began to run but was quickly apprehended by two Gestapo men. They searched the fugitive and uncovered a concealed pistol. The Pole was immediately thrown to the pavement. More Gestapo men arrived. They formed a circle around the bruised Pole and began kicking him from several angles. The man rolled over on his stomach and covered his head with his arms, but hobnailed boots smashed into his ribs. He rolled onto his

side and was kicked in the groin and the ear. He tried to rise but a kick to the solar plexus dropped him to his knees. He screamed as another kick broke his nose. The Pole fell backward into a pool of his own blood, vomited, and kept screaming. Finally, a Gestapo officer stood over him and shot the resistance fighter in the head. The onlooking Poles were sickened by the brutality and terrified by the Gestapo's sadistic retaliation. Joseph Greenblatt knew that he had to stifle his fear and retain his composure if he wanted to avoid a similar fate.

Joseph was forcefully escorted to a police wagon and ordered inside. When he entered the vehicle he noticed three of his companions and five innocent Poles squeezed onto the benches in the rear. The doors were locked and the sirens wailed as the vehicle raced through the streets towards the Gestapo headquarters located in a former police station on the Avenue Szucha.

During the ride neither Joseph nor his underground companions acknowledged each other. They and the five innocent Poles were confused and frightened. Greenblatt knew that he had to divest himself of the gun and grenades. Discovery meant a violent death. Slow and violent. Painful and violent. He thought about what had happened to his comrade who was unfortunate enough to be caught with a gun.

Everyone in the van was preoccupied with the possible terror which awaited at the end of the ride. Some of the innocent Poles were crying and trembling. No one spoke. It wasn't too difficult for Joseph to unobtrusively slip the gun and grenades under the seat as the wagon pulled into the enclosed police yard. There was no search as the men were hurried into the building.

Once inside, Joseph's mind began to work feverishly. He knew that he had to act, and to act perfectly. There was no time for rehearsal. There would never be a second chance. This had to be the performance of his life. He must behave as if he really was a German who was arrested by

mistake. Fortunately, he had a Nazi identification medallion in his pocket. Fixing the fraudulent ID to his coat, Greenblatt casually strolled around the police lobby. No one objected.

Walking up to a Gestapo agent, whose insignia indicated the rank of a senior officer, Joseph pleaded in fluent German: "What is happening here. I'm employed in an official industrial position for the Reich. Is it necessary to jam me in with these stinking Poles?"

The officer stated that he was sympathetic but added that, as a good German, Joseph should appreciate the Gestapo's obligation to act immediately and forcibly when one of their own was killed. He explained that everyone in the vicinity of the shooting had to be taken into custody. Joseph was told that he would have to wait for questioning, that he would be checked out, and then he could go his way--if he checked out, the officer added ominously.

In the meantime, the captured Poles were placed against the wall and searched. All were trembling. The officer then walked off to conduct the interrogation and investigation.

As he still wore his Nazi identification, no one objected as Greenblatt casually strolled amidst the pandemonium. Several people were walking in and out but no one seemed to take notice of him. More Gestapo vans arrived bringing scores of Polish prisoners. Activity was mounting. Gestapo officers, policemen, clerks and functionaries were busy questioning people, searching for files, perusing records, etc. Joseph watched as prisoners were led into side rooms. Soon he heard screams of pain as sadistic Gestapo torturers attempted to extract confessions or information relating to the assassination of their chief.

Knowing that time was running out, Joseph began to move. He opened a door but closed it when it turned out to be a utility closet. He walked to another door and opened it. Standing in

the doorway, Joseph observed a group of about 15 Ukrainian SS troops lounging on benches. At the far end of the room Joseph saw a pair of glass paneled doors which led to the street.

Closing the door behind him, Joseph took a deep breath. Standing erect, with his Nazi insignia in prominent display, he shouted: "Achtung! Stand in formation!" Immediately berating the Ukrainians, who were accustomed to being demeaned by their Nazi overlords, Joseph Greenblatt derisively referred to their sloppy state of dress and the dirty condition of the room. "I will return in 20 minutes and I'll expect you to be ready for an inspection." He walked through their ranks and reached the door, opened it, stepped out and closed it without looking back. As Joseph walked away, he heard the screams and cries of his former companions and the others as they were being questioned and tortured. He walked faster.

# ***THE RAID***

Life with the partisans was exciting and dangerous: the raids, the attacks on Nazi supply lines, ambushes of German troops, destruction of bridges, disruption of communications. All of these actions played an important and honorable part in the war effort.

Greenblatt recalled the successful raid on the ammunition train in the Okopowa Depot. The station was located on the outskirts of Warsaw, adjacent to a graveyard. The partisans were aware that the freight cars were loaded with war material and supplies. The high command of the Armia Krajowa ordered an attack. It was led by Joseph Greenblatt.

The night sky was cloudy and dark. No moon shown over the occupied Polish capital. At 15 minutes past midnight, Joseph led 10 guerrillas through the Powozki Cemetery. The tense fighters noiselessly crawled over the graveyard, taking cover behind headstones. Finally they came to the edge of the cemetery and within striking distance of the depot. Only two German soldiers were observed guarding the train, one on each side of the line of railway cars. Joseph ordered one of the Poles to neutralize the soldier on the right, while he advanced towards the one on the left.

The two fighters synchronized their movements, closing in on their human targets, and striking at the same time. Joseph's left arm snaked around the unfortunate sentry's throat, cutting off his air supply and preventing his vocal cords from functioning. Joseph's right hand drove a knife into the German's kidney and as the German slumped, Greenblatt slit his throat to ensure that no sound would emanate from the guard as he lay dying. The other Pole performed his grisly assignment with similar efficiency.

Greenblatt signaled the remaining eight Polish fighters to move forward and approach the train. It took a few minutes to break the locks on the railway cars. The doors were forced open

and the Polish eyes gleamed at the booty: crates of ammunition, boxes of grenades, stacks of medical supplies. They began to unload the precious cargo, essential war material of which they were in such short supply. In their enthusiasm they failed to realize that they were escalating the sound of unloading containers and even their conversation.

German soldiers ran toward the sounds generated by the Poles. When the troops came into view, the Polish partisans opened fire. Joseph Greenblatt threw several grenades which caused the Nazi troops to abandon formation and take cover. The Poles quickly fled to the cemetery and retreated under cover of the darkness. They were natives of Warsaw and familiar with the area, thus easily eluding the bewildered Germans and escaping with their precious spoils of war. They suffered no casualties. They disappeared into the night.



# ***FREEING THE PRISONERS***

The war wasn't going well for Germany. Its armies were undergoing setbacks on all fronts. Lines of defense had to be constructed. Troops could not be spared for this consuming activity. Therefore, the Nazis drafted non-combatants and utilized them for slave labor. The work was grueling and conditions were wretched; food was meager and sanitary conditions were primitive. Those unfortunates, conscripted into this activity, rarely survived.

The Nazi occupation of Warsaw commenced a roundup of Polish men unlucky enough to be out on the street one morning. The prisoners were jammed into a truck which was parked on Kawenczyka Street and guarded by troops of the Waffen SS. The guards maintained the captives inside the truck while other troops fanned out throughout the neighborhood to conscript more Poles until the truck was filled to capacity with slave laborers.

Joseph Greenblatt and his squad stealthily moved, block by block, through alleyways and side streets, towards the guarded truck which was rapidly filling up with captured Poles. The vehicle's motor was started. Soon it would begin its journey to hell for the unfortunate captives. The time was 3:00 PM.

Greenblatt's squad charged. Joseph threw noise grenades under the truck, avoiding live grenades which would have resulted in death or injury to the Polish prisoners. The SS guards leapt from the truck. Greenblatt's squad fired at them. There were only a few guards when the firefight commenced. The Poles jumped from the truck and ran in several directions, escaping while Greenblatt's squad pinned down the SS defenders. When the prisoners completed their getaway, Greenblatt threw live grenades which neutralized the German resistance. He then ordered a withdrawal and his forces escaped with only two of his fighters wounded. Thirty prisoners were saved.

# ***THE POLISH UPRISING***

July 22, 1944. Hitler's armies were besieged throughout Europe. Operation Barbarosa--the attack on Russia--had been overcome by the ferocious resistance of the Red Army which was now driving westward. Crossing the Vistula River, Soviet troops were poised for an attack on Warsaw.

July 25, 1944. General Tadeuze "Bor" Komorowski, supreme commander of the Armia Krajowa, decided that the time was ripe for the long-planned uprising of the Polish forces. There were 40,000 underground troops ready for mobilization; they were organized into fighting groups with efficient liaison established by courier. This plan was so effective that the Polish General Staff was confident that complete mobilization could take place within 24 hours.

The Armia was fairly well equipped. Arms and explosives were concealed throughout Warsaw, usually under the earth. Buried barrels contained guns, grenades and ammunition. Larger equipment, including machine guns, were concealed within coal carts. Many dwellings contained secret compartments for the storing of war material. General Bor issued orders for the removal of the weapons from concealment and directed that they be cleaned and prepared for combat.

The Polish fighters, in anticipation of the uprising, had the foresight to stockpile food, mainly tinned tongue and wine. As the fighting progressed, they found time and the opportunity to cook barley. Additional canned meat was taken from German storage depots when they were overrun by the Poles. Little water was available but wine was plentiful and easily obtained from the huge stocks of the Stare-Miasto wine merchants.

July 28, 1944. Governor Ludwig Fischer, the district chief in Warsaw, published a directive ordering 100,000 people to assemble in order to construct German defenses against the

Russian invasion which was deemed to be imminent. Bor Komorowski issued a counter-directive instructing all Polish citizens to ignore the order.

July 31, 1944. The Soviet armies were advancing rapidly. Tanks, accompanied by some infantry patrols, were closing in on Warsaw. Some suburbs of the city were already occupied by Russian troops. Bor decided that it was time to fight.

Joseph Greenblatt was contacted again by the mysterious courier, Jacck, and was instructed to appear for mobilization at 0500 hours in Rinek Square, located in the old city. When he appeared, Joseph was placed in charge of 15 fighters. They barricaded the streets leading to the Square, using mattresses, furniture, sandbags, and anything else they managed to acquire. Greenblatt's unit was armed with one machine gun, while each fighter was equipped with a pistol and hand grenades.

August 1, 1944. All through the night the Poles assembled throughout the city and took up their assigned positions. At 0500 hours, all non-military traffic ceased. The Polish fighters, wearing red and white armbands in lieu of uniforms, attacked. The battle was on.

The uprising erupted throughout Warsaw. The Germans responded furiously. Greenblatt's position came under heavy fire. Nazi tanks, flanked by heavily armed troops, blasted the Polish defenders. In addition, the German air force, operating freely in the sky, continually bombed and strafed the Poles who were severely outnumbered and outgunned. The enemy pilots flew their Messerschmitt fighters approximately 100 meters over the Polish positions. Greenblatt directed his machine gunner to repeatedly fire just forward of the attacking planes and managed to blast one out of the sky.

After three days of direct fighting, ammunition was running short and the Polish casualties were mounting. Greenblatt ordered a withdrawal and, while under fire, the Polish defenders dug a 70 yard tunnel which led to the center of the city. Joseph led his surviving fighters through the tunnel, across Aleja Jerozlińska to Nowogrodzka Street, and then fighting their way to Marszalkowska and Placzbawciela Streets where they joined with the survivors of other units to mount a stiff resistance against the attacking Germans. After one week of fighting at this location, the Poles were forced to disperse.

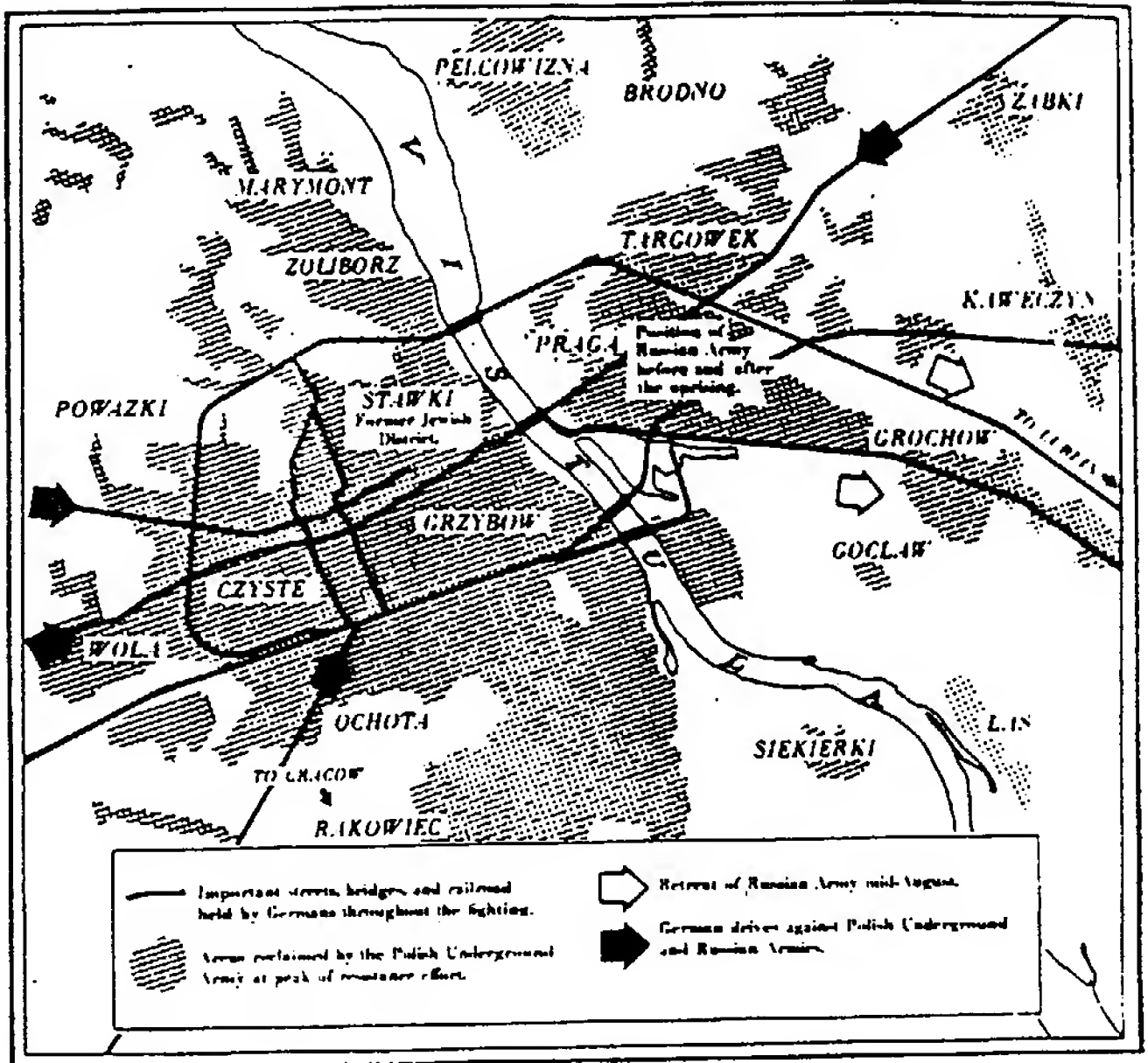
The Germans soon gained the upper hand. Most of the Polish barricades were breached and the defenders scattered. Greenblatt joined with the other Poles to engage the enemy in hit and run attacks, trading casualties. However, the Poles could not sustain the killing match; they lost approximately 15,000 fighters with another 15,000 wounded. The Germans suffered 10,000 killed and an equal number wounded.

After the forced retreat of the Poles, whose positions were rapidly being overrun by the Germans, the Polish commanders ordered the survivors to disperse. Several fled the city while the rest went into hiding. Greenblatt made his way to a bunker located under a burned wreckage of a building located on Wspólna Street #19. He was joined by the Jewish veterans of the uprising who fled the wrath of the Nazis. For four months they hid, foraging like rats in wrecked buildings and crumbling cellars. Hiding during the day, they would venture out at night to search for food and water, stealthily avoiding German patrols. The Russian army came four months later. The ordeal was over.

A tragic footnote to the battle: The resisting Polish fighters were assured that the Russian army, camped near the Vistula, would attack the Nazi troops, crushing them between the Polish

rebels and the Red Army. However, Stalin refused to aid the Poles who were being overwhelmed by the superior forces of the Germans. Ironically, just as the Polish forces refused to help the Jews during the ghetto uprising, the Russians declined to assist the Poles when they revolted. The Polish underground army was annihilated just as the Jewish fighters were destroyed. On October 2nd, General Bor Komorowski signed a capitulation agreement with General Van Dem Bach. This ended the resistance and assured the destruction of Warsaw which was torched--block by block--the only European city assaulted twice during World War II.

The battles over, Bor Komorowski, apostle of Polish resistance, fled to England, avoiding the Communist takeover of his country. He died in London in 1966, declaring that his struggle for Polish freedom had been in vain.



The Warsaw uprising, August - September, 1944



# ***BITTER REUNION***

The battles finally ended with the defeat of the Nazi war machine. Joseph Greenblatt emerged from the ruins of Warsaw and tried to rebuild his life. He sought out his wife who had been living in that city with the Lenczewskis, a sympathetic Polish family. Together they searched for their families. Few survived. Irene lost her mother, four sisters and two brothers. Three other sisters were alive.

After searching all over Warsaw and checking the published lists of survivors, Joseph finally tracked down his sister Helen. They hugged each other for a long time. Joseph was overjoyed. But his momentary happiness turned bitter and agonizing when Helen related what had happened to the family.

The Greenblatts, Joseph's parents, brother Zygmunt and sister Helen, were huddled in a bunker on Nowlipie Street #28 during the ghetto uprising when a squad of Nazi soldiers broke in and rounded them up. Along with other unfortunate Jews, they were transported to the concentration camp at Maidanek. There the Germans murdered Joseph's father and brother. His mother and sister were subsequently sent to Auschwitz. Mrs. Greenblatt died there in the gas chamber. Soon afterwards Helen Greenblatt was selected for death. Helen and the other members of the doomed group were forced into the gas chambers where they were locked in to await the release of the deadly vapor. However, no poison gas was released. The women were forced to stand all through the night, jammed together awaiting death. The Nazis had run out of Zyklon B, the deadly gas used in the exterminations. Helen's murder, along with the others, had to be postponed.

Before the camp could receive a new shipment of poison gas, a startling event occurred which completely upset the Nazi murder schedule. Russian troops broke through the Eastern

defense lines and were advancing towards Auschwitz. At the same time, American forces were moving from the west and approaching the camp.

Although the Germans were beginning to panic, they were not about to lose the opportunity to kill as many Jews as possible. Death camp officials rapidly organized an inmate march--a death march--to the Ravensbruck Concentration Camp. The forced movement of the battered, bruised, sick, and starving women was a study in horror and brutality. The marchers were panic stricken. Whenever one faltered or stumbled out of line, she would be shot and kicked into the ditch lining the road. Many women met their death in this manner.

Because of the violence the night was filled with screams. Prisoners panicked. Guards were confused. The lines of marchers shifted, regrouped, shifted again. Helen Greenblatt, taking advantage of the confusion, threw herself into a ditch lined with dead bodies. She held her breath and remained motionless. Completely exhausted, she was not sure if she would be discovered and shot. The marchers passed. But Helen remained in the ditch of death until morning. As dawn broke and daylight drifted over the horizon, Helen observed trucks rumbling by and heard soldiers speaking English. They were Americans. She was saved.

Although few Jews were still alive, those remaining desperately attempted to uncover information about their families. To assist their endeavors the Jewish Community Center was established in Warsaw after the Nazi withdrawal. Survivors were encouraged to register; the few Jews who managed to escape death were able to locate and reunite with family members who survived. Through the records of the Center, Joseph was able to contact Helen who was living in Liege, Belgium.

Joseph attempted to locate other family members who might have survived the Holocaust. The search yielded grief, disappointment and shock; over forty relatives were killed. Only a cousin survived and eventually migrated to Israel. The Greenblatt family, like so many others, was practically obliterated.

# ***THE RESCUE***

The tragedy of the Holocaust. The heroic resistance of the Jewish fighters. The amazing establishment of the State of Israel. All these events occurred in less than a decade. And yet their enormity occupied center stage on the world scene, not only during their occurrence, but also years later, as they continue to be discussed and debated. Movies continue to be made. Books are still written. History is still taught. All regarding the Holocaust and its aftermath.

However, another story needs to be told. Before, during and after World War II, a massive rescue mission was undertaken, first to save Jews from the Nazi murderers and later, to free them from Europe and transport them to Palestine. The participants in this rescue effort faced great danger with no possibility of personal gain.

With the surrender of Germany, the survivors of the war set about the business of rebuilding their lives and restoring their cities. Not so the remaining Jews of Eastern Europe; they were robbed of their property and subjected to pogroms. Huddled in displaced persons camps, they were maintained by relief organizations which could do little more than house and feed them. There was no future for them in Europe. They were dispirited and forlorn. Having no hope, their fate was left to the whims of strangers. Into this tragic world entered an organization called Bricha - Rescue - organized in Palestine, which created a web of agents operating throughout Europe.

For the British, maintaining hegemony in Palestine was of paramount importance, not only because of Arab oil but to maintain control of the Suez. The waterway assured Britain of access to the Crown's interests in India and its other Asian colonies. The Egyptian Arabs could be controlled within established colonial schemes but a Jewish majority in Palestine appeared inconvenient for British interests.

To obtain worldwide Jewish support during World War I, the British government, on November 2, 1917, issued the Balfour Declaration which stated "Her Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish People...and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object." In 1920, Winston Churchill, then Minister of State for War and Air, reiterated this pledge and spelled out its political intent and geographical extent. However, Britain immediately began to renege on this political and moral obligation and closed the entry to Palestine during World War II as Jews were being murdered by the millions.

With the cessation of hostilities in 1945 the enormity of the Holocaust was exposed to the world. The survivors realized that their only solution to centuries of persecution was to live in a country of their own, a place where they could reside without dependence on the will of their host government. A land where they would speak their own language, where they could live as a free people...A land where they could possess arms and defend themselves.

It would be logical to assume that the European governments would be happy to evacuate the Jewish survivors. However, no country would admit more than a handful. The Bricha organization wanted to transport them to Palestine but the British resisted all such efforts. Therefore, "illegal" channels were established in order to bring the remnants of European Jewry home -- to Palestine.

Shortly after the termination of hostilities between Poland and Germany, Joseph Greenblatt, appointed as the Polish District Commander of Upper Silesia, was contacted by two individuals from the past: Peres Lasker, formerly the second-in-command of the Polish Betar organization, and Stefan Perls, a member of the national executive board of the Zionist

Revisionist group. The two individuals, in a clandestine meeting with Joseph, revealed the existence of the Bricha movement and requested his assistance. They explained that Joseph's military authority, underground contacts and geographic knowledge would be of immense value in smuggling the displaced Jews out of Poland and Germany. The enterprise would be hazardous; "illegal" emigration was forbidden by the Polish authorities. The allied administrations of Britain and America opposed the movement of Jews, in hopes of placating the Arabs. Many surviving Poles, Germans and the eastern European survivors, brimming with anti-Semitism, cruelly exploited, assaulted and murdered Jewish survivors attempting to flee. Although weary after years of armed military combat and perilous underground activities, Joseph Greenblatt volunteered to join the rescue operation.

The activity entailed a great deal of risk but, by now, this was no problem for the fighter whose nerves were numbed by his bloodied past and the loss of so many loved ones. Joseph contrived a daring plan: several Polish Jews, freed from the confines of the concentration camps with nowhere to go, were surreptitiously registered as Greek prisoners-of-war. Commander Greenblatt issued exit visas in order to repatriate the displaced "Greeks" and relieve the Polish government of the expense of their maintenance. The refugees were then transported to the border at Stetin but, instead of continuing through normal transportation channels to Greece, they engaged in a perilous journey, often through hostile territory. Bricha agents guided them across borders, bribed officials and executed informers. Several of the escapees, weakened by years of imprisonment, starvation, injuries and a general dispiritment, perished amidst the hazardous conditions and the constant possibility of reincarceration or death. However, the bedraggled survivors eventually reached ports of cooperative European governments. There they were fed



and rested while preparations were made for the dangerous trip across the Mediterranean Sea to the shores of Palestine.

Joseph Greenblatt has always considered his participation in the rescue of refugees to be one of his most satisfying accomplishments.

## ***ESCAPE III***

After the Nazi defeat in 1945 the Polish Armia Krajowa surrendered its list of officers to the Ministry of Defense. On that list was Jan Bednarcik, AKA Joseph Greenblatt, along with other officers who had proved their courage and leadership in battle. All were mobilized and sent to the city of Gleiwitz in Germany where Joseph was placed in charge of German prisoners of war. Soon after, he was appointed as the Polish commander of the city. During this time he became involved in the Bricha rescue organization.

In March of 1946, Polish and Russian intelligence became aware of the activities of the Bricha organization. Their investigation uncovered several individuals engaged in the illegal transfer of Jewish displaced persons. Joseph Greenblatt received word that the Red intelligence forces were soon to close in on the organization and he knew that it was only a matter of time--very little time--before his participation was uncovered. He would then be arrested, tried and imprisoned for violation of the security codes. It was time to leave Germany. Time to leave Poland.

Captain Greenblatt had no problem requisitioning an army jeep. He then met with a sympathetic Polish priest who was the recipient of favors from Joseph. The priest provided papers identifying Joseph's wife Irene as 'Helena Smuga,' a Christian Pole who was subsequently enlisted as the Captain's 'secretary.'

Joseph left Glewitz and drove to Warsaw where Irene was living at Poznanska #12 in the Russian Zone. His precarious situation was quickly explained. Irene immediately packed and joined her husband in the jeep.

Joseph and his 'secretary' drove across the Polish border without incident, crossed into Germany, and drove straight to Berlin. Entering the Russian Zone he cruised to within sight of

the French Zone and parked the jeep on a dark side street. Captain Greenblatt quickly removed his uniform, donned civilian clothing and, with Irene, silently stole across the lightly guarded checkpoint. The Greenblatts proceeded to the railway terminal and embarked on the train to the American sector where they were admitted as German refugees. (Joseph spoke German; Irene posed as a deaf mute.)

The fugitives were aware of a settlement on the outskirts of Munich, a small farm maintained by Betar members. They traveled there and were welcomed. However, the Greenblatts did not feel safe in Germany. Contact was made with sister Helen who arranged for professional smugglers to spirit Joseph and Irene from Germany to the city of Liege in Belgium.

The Greenblatts were taken through forests by smugglers who were aware of border checkpoints and the ways to avoid them. After spending the night in the woods, Joseph and Irene reached safety in Leige.

***UNDERGROUND***

***EMISSARY***

Joseph Greenblatt felt that he had finally reached safety. Belgium seemed like a comfortable country. The Jews were left alone. Liege was a pleasant city. Joseph and Irene shared a small house with her sister, Helen, and her husband, Gaston Mell, at 72 St. Severin Street. Joseph was able to earn a living, nominal, but sufficient, from the wholesaling of nylon stockings imported from America. Soon the Greenblatts were able to rent their own apartment in a house located at #6 Hovemont Street. Their daughter, Jennie, was born in 1947. The weary survivors were finally able to lead a normal life, free from the horrors of the Holocaust. But, this didn't last long.

The war in Europe was over but fierce fighting was taking place in Palestine; the Jewish underground--the mysterious Irgun--had emerged and openly challenged the British army. Jewish fighters, outraged by the European massacre, defied the British Empire and attacked the English occupation army. Equipment was needed. Money was needed. Guns were needed.

Greenblatt was contacted by Eli Tavin, the Irgun commander in Paris. The situation in Palestine was discussed. The Irgun was outgunned and opposed, not only by the British army and the Arabs, but also by the Jewish establishment. Arms were in short supply and desperately required. Joseph knew that he had no choice. After witnessing the slaughter in Europe, and perpetually pained by the murder of his family, he was committed to the defense of the Jews--anywhere--but especially in their own land.

Joseph was given a simple directive: get guns. They were expensive. Money was sent from Paris by Joshua Halpern, treasurer of the Irgun. Although Joseph had the cash, it wasn't easy to establish the connections. Belgian authorities didn't take a benign attitude towards illegal

arms deals. And the British Counter Intelligence Division was constantly on the alert for shipments of weapons. Weapons which would be used against British troops.

Once again the former infantry fighter, ghetto fighter, resistance fighter called upon his instincts for conspiracy and survival. Purchase of arms without official approval and license was difficult. Transporting them thousands of miles across several foreign borders was practically impossible. But, it had to be done. And Joseph Greenblatt was chosen to do it.

The largest manufacturer of firearms in Belgium was the Fabrique Nationale. However, one could not merely enter the premises, put down cash and expect to be presented with firearms. There were legalities for which Joseph Greenblatt could not qualify. He had to find another way, and quickly.

In the shadowy world of illegal arms acquisition and transportation, there were always those who wanted to make an additional dollar--or franc. Large sums of cash passed from Greenblatt's hand to those who had access to the arms stores at the Fabrique Nationale. Dozens of .38 caliber semi-automatic pistols and rifles were obtained. But the difficulties didn't end with the acquisition of the guns; the guns had to be transported to the Irgun in Palestine. For this endeavor, Joseph enlisted the assistance of "Mickey," a Gentile woman married to a Jew. The guns were carefully packed in unmarked containers and loaded onto trucks which were driven to the French border. Customs service and Border Patrol were bribed to turn their backs as the trucks drove across the checkpoints and into France. The weapons were transported to the port cities in the south of France where they were clandestinely loaded onto ships destined for Palestine.

British Counter Intelligence and Belgian police were not completely unaware that arms smuggling was taking place and that the guns were being used against English soldiers. The net was beginning to close on Joseph so that, after four years in Belgium, he reluctantly made plans to leave.

Although Joseph Greenblatt was aware that he was breaking the law of a country that had granted him safety, a chance to earn a living and a home, however temporary, he felt no remorse, no twinge of conscience. Joseph felt that he was obeying a higher law, a more compelling law, a two thousand year old law. A law of survival. Survival of the remnants of his people.



# *AMERICA*



As did so many refugees from war ravaged Europe, sister Helen sent a letter to the *Daily Forward*, a Jewish newspaper published in America, which indicated that she and Joseph were alive. Subsequently, correspondence was established with Rosa Mintz, sister of Joseph and Helen's mother. Rosa and her husband had the foresight to flee Europe before the Holocaust and were living in New York city. Arrangements were eventually made by Aunt Rosa and Uncle Sam Greenblatt, who lived in Chicago, to sponsor Joseph, Irene and Jennie. Transportation, funds and documents were sent to Belgium and the Greenblatt family once more prepared for life in a new land. Embarking from the port of Le Havre in France on the SS America they arrived in New York on December 28, 1950.

Landing in New York City, with his wife and daughter, Greenblatt was met by his aunt as soon as he cleared customs. The family proceeded to 45 Clinton Street, a dismal cold-water tenement building located in the lower east side, and settled into a tiny apartment; dark and airless. The rooms were cold in the winter, hot in the summer. Bathing facilities consisted of a small bathtub, located in the kitchen, which served as the family's dining table when covered with a sheet of plywood. The toilet was located in the hall and shared by several families. The neighborhood was heavily populated by Jews; poor Jews, some of them Holocaust survivors. There Joseph obtained employment as a shipping clerk in a factory. Irene maintained the apartment and cared for daughter Jennie. There was little money. No luxuries were available to the Greenblatt family except one: peace of mind.

Despite the grim conditions of his existence in America Joseph Greenblatt had no complaints. Although he worked hard for little money and lived in what was then referred to as a slum, the former street fighter, military fighter, ghetto fighter finally felt the assurance of safety.

After years of tension he no longer became tense at the sight of a police uniform, no longer dove for cover at the sound of a siren, no longer lived in the shadows. His daughter went to a public school where nationality and religion were of no significance. His wife shopped in the stores and strolled through the streets without fear and apprehension.

Time passed. conditions improved for the Greenblatt family. Joseph became employed as a travel agent and quickly learned the business. His knowledge of Europe and Israel enabled him to offer practical advice to clients planning overseas vacations. The family was able to move uptown into a comfortable apartment at 515 West 111th Street, an interesting area infused with students and faculty from nearby Columbia University.

Eventually, the family bought a cooperative apartment located at 11 Fort George Hill near the northernmost area of Manhattan. From their terrace on the 17th floor the Greenblatts enjoyed a breathtakingly beautiful view of Manhattan and the Bronx. The home was attractively furnished and immaculately maintained. Jennie married and moved to California where her husband was employed. She has two children. Joseph and Irene continued to reside in New York until his retirement at the age of 82.

He wasn't able to earn much money in America. Few luxuries were available to the Greenblatt family. Employment consisted of a series of menial jobs until he learned the travel business. But the fear and the tension were gone. Joseph Greenblatt was finally able to find peace.

Like many other "wretched refuse" from the "teeming shore" who were greeted by the Lady in the Harbor, Joseph Greenblatt fell in love with America. He was now home.



## ***EPILOGUE***

Sometimes Joseph Greenblatt, the veteran of so many battles, is called to lecture at synagogues, professional organizations or fraternal groups. He relates the horror of his youth with humility and passion. He calls for the young people to be brought before him so that they can share in the pride of their Jewish heritage, and be instilled with the determination to rise against anyone who attempts to replicate the past.

He's 85 now, still erect and muscular, with a full head of hair slowly turning white. He retired two years ago, relocating to the West Coast in order to be able to spend whatever time remains with his daughter and his adoring grandchildren. He still walks hand in hand with his beloved Irene--aged, forever scarred by the memories of the Holocaust, yet hauntingly beautiful, proud of her warrior husband, secure in his presence.

The battles, the slaughter, the carnage; they're all behind him now. Upon reflection, the casual observer might surmise that Joseph Greenblatt and his comrades-in-arms had little positive military effect upon history. After all, the Poles were overrun and the Jews were practically obliterated. But Joseph is proud of the resistance exhibited by his companions and himself. For although the majority of the resistance fighters perished in the fires of Europe, new flames erupted along the Mediterranean coast in less than five years. Jewish fighters, determined not to fall again, raised the banner of defiance and challenged the armed might of enemies outnumbering them fifty to one. The spirit of the ghetto warriors rose once more as Israeli soldiers fought against overwhelming odds. History records their triumph. The legacy of the Warsaw Ghetto lives on.

Joseph and Irené tried to rebuild their lives in America. All that is left are the memories; often they painfully surface, sometimes they mercifully recede. But they never really fade away. It's been a long journey to the depths of hell and back. The round trip is nearly complete.

# ***THE AUTHOR***

George Torodash is the Chief of The Bureau of Criminal Intelligence of a major law enforcement agency. He is a freelance writer whose articles have been published in several major newspapers, magazines and professional journals. He also wrote a prize-winning short story. This is his first book. He has been researching and analyzing Jewish resistance for years and has conferred with several former underground fighters in Europe and Israel.

George resides in New York City with his wife, an artist, and their two children.

